

“Machiavelli with a Heart”: The Johnson Administration’s Food for Peace Program in India, 1965–1966*

Nearly four decades after Lyndon Johnson left office, historians continue to probe the documentary record, hoping to shed additional light on the relationship between the president’s domestic and foreign policies. A series of recent works, including collections edited by Randall Woods and Mitchell Lerner and a study by Thomas Schwartz, adds to our understanding of the competing foreign pressures and issues Johnson and his advisers faced during a time of substantial social, cultural, and political change within the United States.¹ While the Vietnam War looms large in Johnson’s legacy, the president attained several foreign policy successes. The Indian food crisis of 1965–1966 is a noteworthy case in point, because the crisis illustrates, as Johnson himself acknowledged, “two essential elements of the foreign policy of my administration,” one of which was that the United States would support allies who improved their internal political and economic circumstances. The other was the recognition

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1. Randall B. Woods, ed., *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition: The Politics of Dissent* (Cambridge, England, 2003); Mitchell B. Lerner, ed., *Looking Back at LBJ: White House Politics in a New Light* (Lawrence, KS, 2005), especially the essays focusing on domestic issues authored by Julia Kirk Blackwelder, Michael Flamm, Thomas Clarkin, David Shreve, and Robert David Johnson; and Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe in the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA, 2003).

that the Great Society and foreign policy were intertwined.² These principles guided the president as he managed the process of extending food aid—under the provisions of the Food for Peace program—to the Indian government, normally the purview of the Departments of State and Agriculture and the Agency for International Development (AID). The Johnson administration broke the tradition of pro forma, multiyear food agreements in the spring of 1965, preferring to substitute short-term grain shipments. Johnson, determined to serve as his own “county agriculture agent,” personally implemented what administration officials termed the “short tether.” A combination of altruism and self-interest, the short-tether scheme linked U.S. food shipments to the willingness of the Indian Government to implement and perfect American-style economic and agricultural reforms.

This article, drawing upon newly declassified and opened LBJ Library document collections and taped telephone conversations, examines the hypothesis that Johnson intended to export his Great Society reforms worldwide, using humanitarian food aid as a fulcrum for development and as an inducement to support American foreign policy goals. India, viewed by the Johnson administration as the best hope for a stable, Western-style democracy in South Asia, served as the locus for this energy.³ Rather than continue to provide food to India without strings attached, Johnson and administration officials devised the short-tether approach to food aid. The emergence of famine during 1965 and 1966 caused some of the short tether’s architects to reevaluate this strategy in the face of a humanitarian crisis. Johnson, however, elected to keep the tether taut in order to pursue America’s cold war policy objectives in tandem with his humanitarian goals. Johnson’s commitment and personal attention to the Indian food crisis demonstrated both the president’s application of humanitarian aspects of the Great Society in his foreign policy and his recognition of the potential applicability of this issue to the larger matter of U.S. cold war policy.

The U.S. Food for Peace program was a major outgrowth of nearly a century and a half of American humanitarian efforts overseas. Beginning in 1812, the U.S. Government and religious and voluntary organizations had provided foodstuffs and medical supplies to the victims of natural disasters. During World Wars I and II, the government had centralized efforts in the form of the American Relief Association and the Food Administration. The Truman administration’s postwar Marshall Plan distributed commodities and economic assistance in an attempt to reconstruct the devastated European economies, as Point Four did for Latin American nations.⁴ Despite the success of the Marshall Plan,

2. Lyndon B. Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency, 1963–1969* (New York, 1971), 223, 226.

3. See also Dennis Merrill, “Indo-American Relations, 1947–50: A Missed Opportunity in Asia,” *Diplomatic History* 11 (Summer 1987): 203–26.

4. For more detailed discussions of American foreign aid and economic history, see Robert A. Packenham, *Liberal America and the Third World* (Princeton, NJ, 1973); Richard J. Barnet, *Intervention and Revolution: The United States in the Third World* (New York, 1968); Kimber

the United States faced a commodity surplus in the early 1950s. The overproduction of the war years, coupled with advances in technology and farming methods, threatened to depress commodity prices.⁵ One solution to the domestic "problem" of overabundance would find its expression in the voice of a senator from Minnesota.

Hubert Humphrey combined humanitarianism and pragmatism in pressing for a permanent food aid program. The former college professor, mayor of Minneapolis, and cofounder of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor (DFL) party had been elected to the U.S. Senate in 1948. Emboldened by his success in championing food aid to India in 1951, Humphrey pushed for surplus agricultural commodities to be used as a dynamic tool of U.S. foreign policy, while simultaneously strengthening the domestic economy.⁶ Along with Kansas Republican Senator Andrew Schoeppel, he introduced legislation in 1953 and 1954 to disburse the stockpiled grain to nations struggling to import or cultivate food stocks. Fighting world hunger demonstrated the American commitment to the impoverished, showcased the productive capacity of American agriculture, obtained new markets for American goods, and guaranteed fairer prices for agricultural producers.⁷

President Dwight D. Eisenhower also recognized food aid's domestic and foreign benefits and supported Humphrey's bill. In his agriculture message to Congress in January 1954, the Republican president echoed several of the themes articulated by Schoeppel and Humphrey: that the United States could use surplus for disaster relief at home and abroad, that surplus could be incorporated into school lunch programs, and that recipient countries could use aid to "combat internal economic crises or for famine relief."⁸ Eisenhower signed

Charles Pearce, *Rostow, Kennedy, and the Rhetoric of Foreign Aid* (East Lansing, MI, 2001); Thomas W. Zeiler, *American Trade and Power in the 1960s* (New York, 1992); and Diane B. Kunz, ed., *The Diplomacy of the Crucial Decade: American Foreign Relations during the 1960s* (New York, 1994). For a historiographical overview of economic diplomacy, see Diane B. Kunz, "The Power of Money: The Historiography of American Economic Diplomacy," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge, England, 1999), 536–61.

5. For overviews of agricultural innovations, see Randal S. Beeman and James A. Pritchard, *A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century* (Lawrence, KS, 2001); R. Douglas Hurt, *Agricultural Technology in the Twentieth Century* (Manhattan, KS, 1991); and Wayne D. Rasmussen and Gladys L. Baker, *The Department of Agriculture* (New York, 1972) and *Agriculture in the United States: A Documentary History*, 4 vols. (New York, 1975).

6. See Raymond F. Hopkins and Donald J. Puchala, *Global Food Interdependence: Challenge to American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1980), 78. George McGovern also describes the "economic self-interest" accruing from PL-480 in *War against Want: America's Food for Peace Program* (New York, 1964), *The Third Freedom: Ending Hunger in Our Time* (New York, 2001), and *The Essential America: Our Founders and the Liberal Tradition* (New York, 2004).

7. Humphrey chronicles his efforts in creating the Food for Peace program in his autobiography entitled *The Education of a Public Man: My Life and Politics* (New York, 1976). See also Carl Solberg, *Hubert Humphrey: A Biography* (New York, 1984).

8. Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Special Message to the Congress on Agriculture, January 11, 1954," in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower, 1953–1961*

the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954 (68 Stat. 454), commonly known as Public Law 480, into law on July 10, 1954.

Public Law 480 (PL-480) established the conditions and the institutional structure for the disbursement of American food aid. The Title I provision of PL-480 was the most significant aspect of the law, as it permitted the United States to broker concessional sales—on easy credit terms—to nations unable to cultivate sufficient food stocks. Section 104 of the title allowed the American president to use foreign currencies generated by PL-480 sales for eight purposes, including the development of new markets, the administration of American-run schools and community centers, funding of the Fulbright exchange program, and the disbursement of loans to American companies. Title II provisions specified that the president could purchase surplus stocks worth \$300 million and donate them to American religious organizations, such as the Mennonite Central Committee, Hadassah, and Lutheran World Relief, and international relief agencies for use in their overseas feeding programs. The responsibilities accruing under Title III were, appropriately, trifold: the president had the discretion of providing food aid during times of national disaster, U.S. voluntary organizations could accept surplus for use in their domestic and foreign feeding programs, and the United States could barter food for strategic materials.⁹ Eisenhower also issued Executive Order 10560 on September 9, 1954, that delegated specific food assistance responsibilities to the Departments of Agriculture, State, and Treasury and created the Interagency Committee on Agricultural Surplus Disposal (ICASD). ICASD members analyzed country aid requests and evaluated requests according to the amount of commodities in surplus. By the end of 1954, the administration had established a working structure for a foreign food assistance program that would persist until 1961.

Public Law 480 fulfilled the objective of reducing surplus and improving American agricultural prices but lacked a definite humanitarian spirit.

(Washington, DC, 1960), 2: 29–30. See also Burton I. Kaufman, *Trade and Aid: Eisenhower's Foreign Economic Policy, 1953–1961* (Baltimore, 1982).

9. Congress amended PL-480 in 1957, creating Title IV, allowing the United States to barter with Soviet satellites. U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, Subcommittee on Foreign Agricultural Policy, *Food for Peace, 1954–1978—Major Changes in Legislation*, report prepared by the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress, 96th Cong., 1st sess., 26 April 1979, Committee Print, 1; U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, *American Foreign Food Assistance: Public Law 480 and Related Materials*, report prepared for the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, 94th Cong., 2d sess., 13 August 1976, Committee Print, 15; Hopkins and Puchala, *Global Food Interdependence*, 72. See also U.S. Department of State, *Compilation of Information on the Operation and Administration of the Agricultural Trade Development and Assistance Act of 1954* (Washington, DC, c.a. 1960), 4–33. The most comprehensive works to date on the history of PL-480 include Peter Toma, *The Politics of Food for Peace* (Tucson, AZ, 1967), and Mitchell Wallerstein, *Food for War—Food for Peace: United States Food Aid in a Global Context* (Cambridge, England, 1980). For India, see James Warner Bjorkman, “Public Law 480 and the Politics of Self-Help and Short-Tether: Indo-American Relations, 1965–1968,” in *The Regional Imperative: The Administration of U.S. Foreign Policy towards South Asian States under Presidents Johnson and Nixon*, ed. Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1980).

Humphrey lamented the tendency of Eisenhower and his agriculture secretary, Ezra Taft Benson, to stress PL-480's temporary economic benefits. As he explained in a 1954 letter to two Rochester, Minnesota high school students, "Instead of putting so much emphasis on our stockpile of atomic weapons, it seems to me we should be emphasizing our stockpile of food, and sharing it in a spirit of equality and friendship. I am certain that would win us many more friends than does the implied threat of instantaneous [sic] destruction."¹⁰ Critical of the administration's piecemeal and lethargic approach, Humphrey insisted that food aid could be used to influence political and social developments in the newly emerging nations of Africa and Asia and the less-developed nations in Latin America. He proposed legislation in 1959 creating a permanent program to serve as a "more effective instrument for using U.S. abundance of food and fiber to help build essential world conditions of peace and freedom."¹¹ Substituting the term "Food for Peace" for PL-480, the bill specified the creation of a White House Food for Peace office headed by an executive appointee.¹² Although Congress passed, and Eisenhower signed, a diluted version of Humphrey's bill, Eisenhower did little to amplify or implement the new verve of PL-480.¹³

Eisenhower's successor, John F. Kennedy, endorsed and expanded the Food for Peace program, sensing in it a myriad of possibilities for solidifying American relationships with the developing world. Kennedy and his advisers viewed the postcolonial situation, and its place within the larger cold war conflict, from a modernization perspective. As Frank Ninkovich commented, Kennedy "believed that the battlefields in the global conflict for superpower dominance would shift to the underdeveloped nations in the years to come."¹⁴ The chair of the Department of State's Policy Planning Council, Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Walt Rostow, had presaged a "new" diplomacy for the 1960s, a posture that required a "turn-around . . . to a coordinated Free World effort with enough resources to move forward those nations prepared to mobilize their own resources for development purposes."¹⁵ Rostow viewed Third World nations as

10. Hubert Humphrey to constituents, Senatorial Papers, Box 101, Folder—Agricultural Food Surplus, Papers of Hubert H. Humphrey, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota (hereafter cited as Humphrey Papers, MHS); "Food and Fiber as a Force for Freedom, Report by Hubert H. Humphrey to the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry, United States Senate, 21 April 1959" (Washington, DC, 1958).

11. "Summary of Senator Humphrey's Food for Peace Act," Senatorial Papers, Box 424, Folder—Food for Peace 1959 HHH Releases on S. 1711, Humphrey Papers, MHS.

12. See U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *International Food for Peace: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate*, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 7–8, 10 July 1959, Committee Print.

13. *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 1959 (Washington, DC, 1960), 15: 43 contains the law's provisions.

14. Frank Ninkovich, "Anti-Imperialism in US Foreign Relations," in *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition*, ed. Randall B. Woods (Cambridge, England, 2003), 36.

15. Memorandum, "Crucial Issues in Foreign Aid," Walt Rostow to John F. Kennedy, 28 February 1961, U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961–1963: Foreign Economic Policy* (Washington, DC, 1995), 9: 205 (hereafter cited as

progressing through distinct phases, as he elucidated in his 1960 work entitled *The Stages of Economic Growth*; food aid and other forms of economic and cultural diplomacy could undermine Soviet or Chinese connections with developing nations and bind recipient nations closer to the United States.¹⁶

Kennedy signified his commitment to an expanded food aid program by implementing several initiatives, under Executive Order 10915, in January 1961.¹⁷ He realized that Food for Peace required a philosophical and organizational overhaul. The president appointed former history professor and South Dakota Representative George McGovern as the first legitimate Food for Peace director, charged with responsibility for the “continuous supervision and coordination” of food aid.¹⁸ McGovern loathed the characterization of PL-480 as “surplus disposal” and instructed the just-hired Food for Peace staff that the term was off limits. As he recalled in 2001, “We were in the business of feeding hungry children, not disposing of garbage.” Working with his staff, and with the

FRUS, followed by appropriate year). See also memorandum, “Food for Peace through Development,” Manning H. Williams to Bromley Smith, 25 January 1961, *ibid.*, 192–93.

16. Walt Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge, England, 1960). For additional discussions of modernization and development theory, see Walt Rostow, *Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Foreign Aid* (Austin, TX, 1985); Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000). See also Nick Cullather, “Damming Afghanistan: Modernization in a Buffer State,” *Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (September 2002) and “Miracles of Modernization: The Green Revolution and the Apotheosis of Technology,” *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 2 (April 2004); Michael Latham, “Ideology, Social Science, and Destiny: Modernization and the Kennedy-Era Alliance for Progress,” *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 2 (Spring 1998); David Engerman, “The Romance of Economic Development and New Histories of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (January 2004): 24–26; and Nick Cullather, “Development? It’s History,” *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2000). See also Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Kennedy’s Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961–1963* (New York, 1989).

17. McGovern admitted in a 1964 oral interview for the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library that Kennedy “was a little bit bored” talking about farm prices and parity. George McGovern Oral History Interview, 24 April 1964, by John Newhouse, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts (hereafter cited as JFKL) and McGovern, *The Third Freedom*, 50. Humphrey, too, recounted that he had tried to get Kennedy to “think more seriously” about agriculture while they were Senate colleagues, to which Kennedy responded: “Hubert, you are causing me nothing but trouble. We don’t have many farmers in Boston and they don’t understand all this price-support stuff that you are trying to get me to vote for.” As quoted in Humphrey, *The Education of a Public Man*, 230. See also James N. Giglio, “New Frontier Agricultural Policy: The Commodity Side, 1961–63,” *Agricultural History* 63, no. 3 (Summer 1987) and *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence, KS, 1991).

18. “Executive Order 10915,” U.S. Department of State *Bulletin* 44 (13 February 1961): 217; John F. Kennedy, “Memorandum to Federal Agencies on the Duties of the Director of the Food-for-Peace Program,” 24 January 1961, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1961–1963* (Washington, DC, 1962), 1: 6. See also Willard W. Cochrane, “Public Law 480 and Related Programs,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 331, *Agricultural Policy, Politics, and the Public Interest* (September 1960), 14–19, for an analysis of PL-480’s shortcomings and potential from an academic standpoint. Thomas Knock asserts that the Peace Corps notwithstanding, McGovern’s tenure as Food for Peace director had produced “the greatest humanitarian achievement of the Kennedy-Johnson era,” in “Come Home America: The Story of George McGovern,” in Woods, ed., *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition*, 82–120. See also Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston, 1965), 170, 604–5.

cabinet agencies responsible for the proprietary functions under the law, McGovern focused on child and maternal health, the linkage between proper nutrition and education, scientific advances in agricultural production, and collaboration between the United States and international organizations.

During the three years of the Kennedy administration, American officials launched the Operation Niños school feeding program in Brazil and Peru, approved the dispatch of a Food for Peace bus to Latin America in order to distribute commodities and demonstrate food preparation methods, instituted "Food for Wages" projects in Afghanistan and Tunisia, and endorsed U.S. participation in multilateral initiatives such as the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization's (FAO) "Freedom from Hunger" campaign.¹⁹ Taken together, the projects developed under a strengthened Food for Peace program suggested that American leaders understood that these forms of "soft" power proved useful as a diplomatic tool. The farm was now a "dynamic force in foreign policy."²⁰ Food aid helped to create the security and stability the United States required of the developing world while also serving as "a vivid reflection of the American people's long and proud humanitarian tradition."²¹

Lyndon Johnson's basic view of American food assistance was shaped by his personal history, his political future, and his understanding of domestic concerns and foreign exigencies. Johnson, growing up in the Texas hill country, understood the poverty and environmental calamities that many farmers faced without electricity, mechanized farming implements, and adequate governmental assistance. So, too, could Kennedy's successor sympathize with children who went hungry, as he observed during his short teaching career in rural Texas during the 1920s. His secretary of state, Dean Rusk, hailing from a similar background, suggested that the president's form of "rural populism" predisposed him toward assisting the less fortunate.²² Thus, both Johnson and Rusk, Randall Woods concluded, pursued these types of policies not only to contain communist expansion but also "out of a determination to uplift the downtrodden."²³

Recognizing food aid as a priority also dovetailed with Johnson's political prospects. Johnson took up what he termed the "martyr's cause" in late

19. *Food for Peace: Nineteenth Semiannual Report on Activities Carried on under Public Law 480, 83d Congress, as Amended, Outlining Operations under the Act during the Periods July 1 through December 31, 1963*, House Document no. 294-88/2 (Washington, DC, 1964).

20. Knock, "Come Home America," 97.

21. Agency for International Development, U.S. Department of State, *Food for Peace: The Creative Use of America's Abundance in International Development* (Washington, DC, 1963).

22. Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State, *The Making of Foreign Policy—An Interview with Secretary of State Dean Rusk* (Washington, DC, 1964), 32. Emmette S. Redford and Richard T. McCulley note that Johnson's aides Harry McPherson and James Gaither reached a similar conclusion. According to Gaither, Johnson favored the "idea of opportunity," that people needed "a chance to help themselves." Quoted in *White House Operations: The Johnson Presidency* (Austin, TX, 1986), 50–51. See also Thomas W. Zeiler, *Dean Rusk: Defending the American Mission Abroad* (Wilmington, DE, 2000), 30–31.

23. Randall B. Woods, "Fulbright, the Vietnam War and the American South," in Woods, ed., *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition*, 153.

November 1963, acknowledging that his own survivability was linked to his predecessor's legislative record. Kennedy's New Frontier would be realized, but so would Johnson's own domestic reform agenda, his "platform for 1964."²⁴ As outlined in a 1964 commencement address delivered at the University of Michigan, Johnson's Great Society targeted listlessness and brought financial, educational, political, and cultural opportunities to those traditionally on the periphery of white, middle-class society. The administration launched an impressive array of programs during the 89th Congress, under the Great Society and War on Poverty banners, focusing on expanded educational opportunities, civil and voting rights, conservation, and health care. The early successes of Johnson's domestic program convinced the president to export the Great Society writ large, thus creating a "dynamic and peaceful world community of open societies."²⁵ As he remarked on more than one occasion, "My foreign policy is the Great Society."²⁶

The administration's global Great Society centered, in part, on the emerging problem of global food insufficiency. While the United States retained some surplus, American governmental and public leaders asserted that the United States would be unable to meet global needs that were predicted to skyrocket during the next decade. Instead, the United States advocated a policy of self-help, requiring recipient nations to institute American-style reforms in exchange for continued assistance. A 1964 AID memorandum entitled "New Directions in Foreign Aid" aptly summarized this approach: "With respect to developing countries that are ready to sacrifice and work hard, the best and cheapest aid policy . . . is to give them maximum help, which will lead to economic independence, and the end of the need for aid, in the shortest possible time."²⁷ In this instance, working "hard" translated into recipient nations adopting American-style agricultural practices. In so doing, these nations would strengthen their own economies and emerge as markets for American agricultural products such as hybrid seeds, pesticides, and fertilizers.

24. Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times 1961–1973* (Oxford, 1998), 61.

25. Lyndon B. Johnson, "Remarks at the University of Michigan," 22 May 1964, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Lyndon B. Johnson, Book 1, 1963–1964* (Washington, DC, 1965) (hereafter cited as *Public Papers: Johnson*, followed by volume and year), 1: 704–7; memorandum, David Bell to Johnson, "New Directions in Foreign Aid," 8 December 1964, transmitted under a 9 December covering memorandum to Bill Moyers, White House Central Files (WHCF) Confidential Files (CF) Foreign Affairs (FO) 3–2 Mutual Security 1963–1964, Box 46, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereafter cited as LBJL).

26. Memorandum for the Record, "The President's Meeting with Indian Ambassador B. K. Nehru, 6 pm. 9 September 1965 (off the record)," *FRUS, 1964–1968: South Asia* (Washington, DC, 2000), 25: 375.

27. Memorandum, David Bell to Johnson, "New Directions in Foreign Aid," 9 December 1964, *FRUS, 1964–1968: International Development and Economic Defense Policy; Commodities* (Washington, DC, 1997), 9: 73.

India served as one of the first test cases for tying PL-480 agreements to self-sufficiency measures and placing food aid on a shorter rein than before. The country had experienced several famines since achieving independence from the United Kingdom in 1947, including one during Johnson's first few months in office.²⁸ Although the United States, officially and privately, had extended assistance during the 1951 famine, American officials became increasingly convinced that Indian agricultural methods were hopelessly outdated and that Food for Peace agreements simply treated the symptoms of agricultural "backwardness" rather than curing the problem of insufficient production. In response, cabinet officials, including Rusk, Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, and AID Directors David Bell and William Gaud, in addition to National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy and his deputy Robert Komer, developed the "short-tether" policy in order to spur agricultural change. Instead of single-year or multiyear PL-480 agreements, the administration reserved the right to arrange monthly commitments.

Although agricultural modernization served as one of the major diplomatic approaches the administration adopted toward India, influencing Indian foreign policy concerning U.S. Cold War priorities served as another. The new nation existed as a moderating force in South Asia at a time when American efforts were increasingly focused on the war in Vietnam and on disturbances in Indonesia and Egypt. Intending to bolster acceptable Asian governments against Chinese or Soviet gains, the United States had—to varying degrees and scale—provided military and economic assistance to India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines throughout the first two decades of the Cold War.²⁹ India alone absorbed \$30 billion worth of agricultural assistance from 1954 through 1965. American politicians recognized the dangers of letting either India or Pakistan drift. Underscoring the vital importance of India to American foreign policy, Komer asserted: "If India falls apart we are the losers. If India goes Communist, it will be a disaster comparable only to the loss of China. Even if India reverts to pro-Soviet neutralism, our policy in Asia will be compromised. These risks are

28. See especially Robert J. McMahon, "Food as a Diplomatic Weapon: The India Wheat Loan of 1951," *Pacific Historical Review* 56, no. 3 (August 1987); "Too Many People, Too Little Food," *Time*, 31 July 1964, 29; "India: Fear of Famine," *Newsweek*, 10 August 1964, 38.

29. For historiographical views of U.S.–South and Southeast Asian relations, see Gary R. Hess, "Global Expansion and Regional Balances: The Emerging Scholarship on United States Relations with India and Pakistan," *Pacific Historical Review* 56, no. 2 (May 1987); Ruth McVey, "Change and Continuity in Southeast Asian Studies," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26 (March 1995); Robert J. McMahon, "The Cold War in Asia," in *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941*, ed. Michael J. Hogan (Cambridge, England, 1999) and *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York, 1999). See also Nick Cullather, *Illusions of Influence: The Political Economy of the United States-Philippines Relations, 1942–1960* (Stanford, CA, 1994); Dennis Merrill, *Bread and the Ballot: The United States and India's Economic Development, 1947–1963* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990); and Andrew J. Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India, 1947–1964* (Ithaca, NY, 2000).

real, and the irony is that they are dangerous for Pakistan as well.” Komer’s concerns about India’s potential instability and gravitation toward the Soviet Union reflected both a long-standing American apprehension and U.S. assumption that India and China were in competition as models of development, and that Indian success would demonstrate that democracy and development were compatible.

American policymakers expected Pakistan, India, and other regional powers to serve American strategic interests by limiting criticism of U.S. foreign policy. Johnson stressed on more than one occasion that he wanted a quid pro quo from Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri’s government: in exchange for commodities, the Indian government needed to restructure the agricultural sector in addition to moderating official comments on the situation in Vietnam.³⁰ The short tether also held out the possibility that, by placing the Indian leaders on “notice,” it would serve as a brake on the historical conflict between India and Pakistan and prevent India from developing nuclear capabilities as a deterrence strategy against the People’s Republic of China.

Famine challenged the sustainability of the administration’s Indian short-tether posture and loosened the consensus that had developed between Johnson, his advisers, and his cabinet. The 1965 and 1966 Indian food crises illustrated the differences between providing aid to spur economic development and moderate criticism and extending assistance at a time of emergency. Johnson, much to the disappointment of those responsible for Food for Peace, intended to keep a tight watch over PL-480 agreements, even as famine conditions worsened on the subcontinent, and even though his advisers encouraged him to temporarily suspend the short tether. Brushing these suggestions aside, Johnson maintained his position that, although painful, the short tether was necessary for U.S. interests. In advocating this perspective, and discrediting other points of view as favoring Indian interests, the president demonstrated that he, not Freeman nor Rusk nor Bell, made the final decisions concerning Food for Peace. In Johnson’s view, the sustainability of the Food for Peace program rested on Indian success and his ability to influence India to achieve agricultural modernization.

Shortcomings in Indian agricultural production and declining U.S. grain stocks prompted the United States to reorder its aid relationship with India in early 1965. American officials faulted former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his successor, Shastri, for not allocating sufficient resources to the agricultural sector. Freeman expressed this concern earlier in 1964 after an onsite review of Indian agriculture.³¹ He later lamented to Johnson: “We should have insisted that she [India] invest more in the agricultural sector of her economy as

30. Robert J. McMahon, “Toward Disillusionment and Disengagement in South Asia,” in *Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963–1968*, ed. Warren I. Cohen and Nancy Bernkopf Tucker (Cambridge, England, 1994), 167.

31. *Administrative History of the Department of Agriculture*, Special Files, Box 1, Administrative Histories, Department of Agriculture, LBJL.

a condition for our heavy PL-480 transfers. That's history."³² Indian prioritization of steel mills and manufacturing over agricultural research and growth, Freeman insisted, resulted in a nation unable to feed all of its citizens during an emergency. Nor could the United States afford to continue the pro forma PL-480 India agreements, as wheat stocks continued to decline to a level that a *Newsweek* magazine writer colloquially proclaimed: "The silos aren't bulging any more."³³

The president, in April 1965, instructed Ambassador to India Chester Bowles to add grains to a preexisting PL-480 agreement negotiated in September 1964, rather than negotiate a new, multiyear agreement as Shastri had requested.³⁴ The decision perplexed the ambassador, who assumed that Johnson's oversight of PL-480 would be minimal at best. As a matter of administrative priorities, PL-480 agreements, in Bowles's view, normally would not require the president's attention. Bowles, the former governor and representative from Connecticut, who had served as ambassador to India (1951-1953, 1963-1969) with stints as undersecretary of state (1961) and ambassador at large (1961-1963), had the disadvantage of being perceived as "pro-Indian," as former Ambassador Howard Schaffer notes in his biography of Bowles. While Bowles agreed that the Indian government needed to embrace reform, he disparaged Johnson's approach. In an embassy New Delhi/AID/United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) telegram, the ambassador lamented that the United States would "impose our ideas upon GOI [Government of India] by constantly threatening to withhold food supplies."³⁵ Johnson further challenged Bowles's assumption after the president notified his White House staff that any and all Indian and Pakistani food aid decisions—including the types and quantities of commodities encompassed in an agreement—had to be vetted by the White House.³⁶ Johnson thus indicated his intention to use PL-480 as a bargaining tool with the Shastri government.

32. Memorandum, Freeman to Johnson, 23 November 1964, WHCF, CF, Agriculture (AG) 1963-1964, Box 1, LBJL. Freeman devotes an entire chapter to the Indian food crisis in *World Without Hunger* (New York, 1968), 145-66.

33. "Answers to Hard Problems," *Newsweek*, 23 August 1965, 66.

34. Treaties and Other International Acts Series (TIAS) 5669, 30 September 1964, U.S. Department of State, *Treaties in Force: A List of Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States in Force on January 1, 1965* (Washington, DC, 1965), 90 (hereafter cited as *Treaties in Force* followed by the year).

35. Howard Schaffer, *Chester Bowles: New Dealer in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA and London, 1993), 281. Bowles to Dean Rusk, 20 August 1965, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Record Group (RG) 59, Central Files 1964-1966, AID (US) 1, College Park, Maryland. See also Chester Bowles, *Promises to Keep: My Years in Public Life 1941-1969* (New York, 1971).

36. TIAS 5793, 16 United States Treaty (U.S.T.) 664, 21 April 1965, U.S. Department of State, *United States Treaties and Other International Agreements*, vol. 16, pt. I: 1965 (Washington, DC, 1965), 100 (hereafter cited as *United States Treaties* followed by volume and year). Memorandum, Robert Komer to Johnson, 9 September 1965, National Security File (NSF), National Security Council Histories Indian Famine, August 1966-February 1967, vol. I: Background Tabs 1-1B, Box 25, LBJL. Komer became deputy special assistant to the president for national security affairs in October 1965.

It was, in fact, Johnson's advisers who furnished the outline and substance of the administration's short-tether approach toward India. Johnson had retained Harvard academician McGeorge Bundy as his special assistant for national security affairs and Robert Komer, who served as Bundy's deputy. These architects of the short tether surmised that smaller, stop-gap aid agreements—one year instead of two—combined with agricultural reforms would force internal changes in Indian farming, including the adoption of new seed hybrids and application of pesticides and fertilizers. Indian acceptance of what Freeman termed American “know-how” promised to unleash an agricultural “revolution.” As the acerbic Komer quipped, the United States was the only nation equipped to “force the grain revolution down the throats of the Indian Government.” Bundy communicated this approach to Bowles in April, cautioning the ambassador that immediate approval of the Indian Government's request “might deprive us of major leverage before we have fully worked out what we want Indians to do in return, at least in agricultural sector.”³⁷ Johnson waited until July 1965 to increase the commodities specified under the April 21, 1965, extension, rather than enter into a new agreement. In the interim, he suggested that Komer and Bundy, in addition to the functional department heads, stall Indian officials by feigning “technical difficulties” associated with commodity transport.³⁸

Other U.S. officials asserted that Indian agricultural changes could also be linked to the American domestic agenda and a more expansive humanitarian assistance program. PL-480 had to transcend its origins in order to survive during a time of decreased agricultural production. The solution lay in recasting PL-480 along the lines suggested for the larger farm program.³⁹ The 1965 draft farm legislation reflected a more rational approach to agricultural production and thoughtful understanding of global problems. Planned agriculture, which served as a leitmotif of the Freeman years at the USDA, sought to eliminate the surplus/deficit situation endemic to American agriculture by deliberately planting certain crops according to domestic and foreign needs.⁴⁰ These commodities could then be used in PL-480 agreements in exchange for assurances that the recipient nation would implement self-help practices. Bundy and Freeman asserted that the Indian situation served as an impetus for launching a “world

37. Transcript, Robert W. Komer Oral Interview, January 1970, by Joe Frantz, LBJL.

38. Memorandum of Conversation between B. K. Nehru and Thomas Mann, 1 June 1965, NSF Country File, India, Box 129, India Memos and Misc., vol. V, 1 of 2; Lal Bahadur Shastri to Johnson, 9 July 1965, *ibid.*, Box 136, Folder—India Shastri Correspondence; memorandum for the record, 16 July 1965, *ibid.*; Box 129, India Memos and Misc., vol. V, 1 of 2; TIAS 5846, 26 July 1965, U.S. Department of State, *United States Treaties*, vol. 16, pt. II, 1965 (Washington, DC, 1965), 1064–65.

39. For an excellent treatment of the Johnson administration's agricultural policy, see Robert David Johnson, “Politics, Policy, and Presidential Power: Lyndon Johnson and the 1964 Farm Bill,” in Lerner, *Looking Back at LBJ*, 153–80.

40. See Paul Hammond, *LBJ and the Presidential Management of Foreign Relations* (Austin, TX, 1992) for additional information on Freeman as an agricultural “innovator.”

war against hunger" with a revitalized Food for Peace program as a fulcrum. "Such an initiative on your part," Freeman rhapsodized to the president, "would capture the imagination of people from palaces to palisades, to slums, to mud huts all over the world."⁴¹ This example of the Great Society writ large reinforced the administration's other initiatives, especially the president's promise to revitalize North Vietnam and the Mekong Delta with American-style internal improvements such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA).⁴²

An equally important justification for the short-tether policy stemmed from the administration's diplomatic relationships with South Asian nations and other regional powers. During the postwar era, the United States had cultivated security and assistance agreements with South and Southeast Asian nations, individually or under the aegis of the South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO). These nations looked to the United States at a time when Asia had grown increasingly unstable due to the emergence of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Korean conflict, and Vietnam. Likewise, American politicians viewed these nations as necessary players in bolstering American strategic interests. Johnson, like his predecessors, believed that in exchange for American diplomatic, military, and economic support, regional nations, which had been pushed to serve in that role, should pursue a path beneficial to U.S. interests.⁴³

In February 1964, attempting to maintain the goodwill that Kennedy had built up with Pakistani President Ayub Khan and also to improve Indo-U.S. relations, Johnson approved National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 279 which provided Military Assistance Program (MAP) funds to both India and Pakistan in order to prevent either from securing assistance from China or the Soviet Union. Johnson, in addition, expected some degree of support for his Vietnam policy. However, as early as 1965, Ayub and Shastri, to varying degrees, publicly criticized American conduct of the war, especially the bombing raids over North Vietnam. The president found this position especially egregious,

41. Working paper, "Proposed Legislation on Food Aid," 4 January 1965, Secretary of Agriculture Files, Chronological File 1964-1966, Box 11, Papers of Orville L. Freeman, Minnesota Historical Society (hereafter cited as Freeman Papers, MHS); memorandum, "Report," Freeman to Johnson, 9 June 1965; memorandum, "World Food Peace Offensive," Freeman to Johnson, 30 August 1965, both *ibid.*; memorandum, "A Strategy for Using P.L. 480 for World Development," Freeman to Johnson, 2 July 1965, transmitted under covering memorandum and with attached livestock income report, WHCF, CF, FO 3-2, Mutual Security April-July 1965, Box 47, LBJL; draft message to Congress, "War on Hunger: A Challenge and a Commitment," 24 July 1965, transmitted under cover of a 20 August 1965 memorandum from Komer to Califano, *ibid.*; and memorandum, Freeman to Califano, 31 August 1965, *ibid.*, AG Agriculture 3/4/65-11/18/65, Box 1, LBJL.

42. "Address at Johns Hopkins University: 'Peace without Conquest,'" 7 April 1965, *Johnson Papers*, 1965 I: 3: 394-99. See also David Ekbal, "'Mr. TVA': Grass-Roots Development, David Lilienthal and the Rise and Fall of the Tennessee Valley Authority as a Symbol of U.S. Overseas Development, 1933-1973," *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2002).

43. For evidence of this point, see Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War on the Periphery: The United States, India and Pakistan* (New York, 1994), 317 and H. W. Brands, *The Wages of Globalism: Lyndon Johnson and the Limits of American Power* (New York and Oxford, 1995), 141.

based on his conviction that the United States was fighting “their war” in Vietnam.⁴⁴

Airing these complaints publicly raised Johnson’s ire and threatened to derail congressional support for foreign aid in general and aid for India and Pakistan in particular. Ayub’s various forms of accommodation with the Communist Chinese government, which Robert McMahon termed an “egregious provocation,” were unsettling to the president, as was Ayub’s “silence” in response to American requests for Pakistani assistance toward the Vietnam war effort.⁴⁵ The Indo-U.S. relationship also revealed fissures. Shastri, terming the situation in Vietnam as “really depressing and dangerous,” had pushed for a halt in U.S. and South Vietnamese air strikes (ROLLING THUNDER) against North Vietnam.⁴⁶ Meeting with B. K. Nehru at the Department of State on July 13, 1965, Johnson informed the ambassador “there was no easy way to settle Vietnam, but constant Indian comments didn’t help the situation any. In effect Shastri should keep quiet about Vietnam.” However, if “Shastri knew how to settle Vietnam, we wished he would tell us.” The president informed Nehru that, although he “was strongly for providing such help,” he wanted the Congress to debate food aid, much to the chagrin of the National Security Council (NSC), Department of State, and AID, whose officials asserted that this maneuver tied the administration’s hands in other foreign-policy approaches.⁴⁷ Johnson remained convinced that involving Congress in decisions of this scale proved politically expedient, and returned to this approach when confronted by escalating Indian aid demands during the spring of 1966.

Resurgence of a decades-old regional conflict between India and Pakistan further strained the relationships between the United States and both nations. The status of the Kashmir province—a disputed state over which India and Pakistan had fought in 1948, which had been divided by a UN cease-fire line—remained a thorn in the side of Pakistani and Indian leaders, and became one for Johnson. India had provoked the latest round of hostilities by extending the provisions of the Indian constitution to Kashmir’s inhabitants in December 1964. The possibility that the Indian and Pakistani armies might use arms against each other, which became more and more likely throughout 1965, threatened to stretch thin a Johnson administration already taxed by commit-

44. Memorandum, “Meeting on Pak/Indian Aid Decisions, Noon, 9 June 1965,” Komer to Johnson, *FRUS, 1964–1968* 25: 272–73; memorandum, Komer to Bundy, 18 June 1965, NSF National Security Council Histories Indian Famine, August 1966–February 1967, vol. I., Background Tabs 1–1B, Box 25, LBJL.

45. Robert J. McMahon, “Ambivalent Partners: The Lyndon Johnson Administration and Its Asian Allies,” in *Beyond Vietnam: The Foreign Policies of Lyndon Johnson*, ed. H. W. Brands (College Station, TX, 1999), 171; memorandum of conversation, “US Military Assistance to India,” 7 July 1964, *FRUS, 1964–1968* 25: 133; memorandum of conversation, “President’s Conversation with Amb. McConaughy,” 15 July 1964, *ibid.*, 137.

46. Shastri to Johnson, 23 May 1965, *ibid.*, 264.

47. Memorandum for the Record, “President’s Talk with Ambassador B. K. Nehru, July 13, 1965,” *FRUS, 1964–1968* 25: 300–303. Drafted by Komer.

ments in Vietnam and Latin America and dissuade those in Congress from committing sizable amounts of money in the absence of a tangible payoff. A prolonged confrontation between the two South Asian powers also had the potential to involve both Communist China and the Soviet Union in the imbroglio. If that occurred, this conflict, combined with Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates that the Indian Government had the capability of producing a nuclear device by the end of the decade, suggested that Food for Peace agreements—without strings attached—would be a relic of the past.

The outbreak of sporadic armed conflict between India and Pakistan in August 1965 revealed Johnson's disinclination to suspend the short tether and, more significantly, to provide any assistance to either nation. As UN Secretary-General U Thant attempted to broker a cease-fire between the parties during the first part of September, the United States and Great Britain announced the indefinite suspension of military and economic aid, with the exception of PL-480 commodities previously programmed.⁴⁸ Attempting to ward off future congressional attacks on the foreign aid program, Rusk assured American legislators that the president would consult Congress before any resumption of MAP or economic aid shipments. He also cautioned Bowles and Ambassador to Pakistan Walter McConaughy that the congressional mood toward continued aid was "violent," noting that Congress might suspend the aid initiative outright, rather than indefinitely.⁴⁹

Johnson's thinking during this period was encapsulated in a telephone conversation among the president, Ambassador to the United Nations Arthur Goldberg, and Johnson adviser and future Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford. The president explained that he had to decide whether or not to "send about 35 million a month in giveaway food to India." The Indian Government, rather than looking to the United States for assistance, needed to draw upon its own food reserves. Johnson expressed his frustration with the apparent inability of the Indian Government to offer him anything in return for PL-480: "I don't know if we got an obligation the rest of our lives just to ship them 10 percent of what they eat. And not without even having agreement or discussions, or tying in any alliance, or to be sure of serving our national interests." More telling was Johnson's comment that he was "humane, but I don't have to feed the world. I'll sell them anything they want to buy. I haven't got any inherent or constitutional requirement that I know of to furnish it to them ad infinitum."⁵⁰ The president eventually relented, approving monthly extensions of PL-480 in September, October, and November 1965 after Undersecretary of State George Ball pre-

48. U Thant, "The Situation in Kashmir," report presented to the United Nations on 3 September 1965, in U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1965* (Washington, DC, 1968), Document IX-64, 797-801.

49. Telegram 390/322 from the Department of State to the Embassies in India and Pakistan, 8 September 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 372; Richard Halloran, "U.S. Weighs Pressure on Kashmir Foes," *Washington Post*, 15 September 1965.

50. Editorial Note, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 407-9.

sented his findings that a moderate relaxation of the short tether benefited U.S. interests and after both nations agreed to a cease-fire. Komer believed this approach "scare[d] both [India and Pakistan] enough to give us all the leverage we need, while still minimizing the risk."⁵¹

India's continued flirtation with the development of nuclear technology and attempts at conventional rearmament also served as a brake on PL-480. The detonation of a Chinese nuclear device in 1964 raised an additional set of concerns for American and Indian policymakers alike. American officials surmised that the Chinese action, and also India's hostile relationship with Pakistan, would impel the Indian Government to develop its own nuclear capacity and spur other regional powers to devise their own weapons systems. Strategists at the CIA, the Department of State, the National Security Agency (NSA), the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) concluded in October 1965 that the Indian Government would have the capability to detonate a nuclear device by the end of the decade.⁵² The administration had made nuclear nonproliferation a key component of U.S. foreign policy, and therefore U.S. officials needed to thwart Indian efforts in this vein. During the aftermath of the Indo-Pakistan conflict, Komer outlined his concerns for the shape of U.S.-South Asian policy. Keeping "India from going nuclear" surfaced as a primary objective. If the Indian Government continued to rely on PL-480 agreements to augment its food stocks, monies that could be used for agricultural improvements might be redirected toward weapons development. The connection between defense subsidies and PL-480 was evident in the administration's foreign-policy approaches to other powers. The United States had harnessed Food for Peace to the war effort in Vietnam in order to drive down consumer prices and allow the South Vietnamese Government to redirect government spending toward weaponry. Israel benefited from Title I agreements, as the influx of commodities also permitted the Israeli Government to bolster its arsenal.⁵³ Both instances suggested that the U.S. Government

51. Report, "PL 480 for India and Pakistan," Ball to Johnson, 19 September 1965, NSF, Robert Komer Name File, Komer Memos, vol. II (2), Box 6, LBJL; memorandum, Komer to Johnson, *ibid.*; memorandum for the record (prepared by Rusk), 27 October 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 455. TIAS 5875, 16 U.S.T. 1257, 29 September 1965 and TIAS 5895 16 U.S.T. 1707, 4 November 1965, *Treaties in Force, 1966* (Washington, DC, 1966); memorandum, "India and Pakistan," Bundy and Komer to Johnson, 5 October 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 444-47; memorandum, Komer to Bundy and Moyers, 20 October 1965, NSF, Bundy Papers, Chronological File 1-20 October 1965, 1 of 3, Box 12, LBJL.

52. Special National Intelligence Estimate, SNIE 31-1-65, "India's Nuclear Weapons Policy," 21 October 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 451.

53. *Food for Peace: 1964 Annual Report on Public Law 480* (Washington, DC, 1965), 100; memorandum, "The Status of Non-Military Actions in Vietnam," Chester Cooper to Johnson, 10 September 1965, NSF, Country File, Vietnam, Box 198, 41 Pt. Program in Non-Military Sphere in SVN, LBJL; memorandum, "Tanks for Israel," Myer Feldman to Johnson, 14 March 1964, *FRUS, 1964-1968, Arab Israeli Dispute 1964-67* (Washington, DC, 2000), 18: 71; memorandum, "FY-1965 Help to Israel," Rusk to Johnson, NSF, Country File, Israel, Box 139, vol. III, Memos and Misc., 9/64-2/65, LBJL.

offered food assistance in order to serve its own strategic interests in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. U.S. officials reasoned that utilizing PL-480 as a stick to ward off nuclear weapons development served a similar purpose.

A consensus had developed, within the Johnson administration, by the fall of 1965 that Food for Peace would be used to pressure Indian agricultural reforms and shape Indian diplomatic behavior. As Bundy and Komer concluded, "Whatever our other failings, we play your tune, and most people know it."⁵⁴ Attaching the Food for Peace program to these goals improved the program's viability at a time of diminishing surpluses and minimized congressional opposition. Food for Peace stood for the administration's ideological commitment to a global Great Society. In the abstract, self-help requirements might eventually generate the types of capitalist, liberal, and economic reforms envisioned for India and other nations deemed essential in the American strategic canon. The immediacy of famine demanded a different approach. As the subcontinent suffered from the absence of monsoon rains, resulting in a spate of food riots, Johnson continued to maintain the short-tether policy.⁵⁵

The president's decision placed him at odds with his cabinet and other administration officials who wanted to release grain immediately. Onsite inspections of the Indian agricultural situation during the summer of 1965 indicated that continued delays in negotiating food aid agreements would have a disastrous effect on the Indian food supply. Department of State officials feared that continued use of the short tether might negatively impact Shastri's ability to lead the country. Composing a briefing memorandum for Rusk to use in a meeting with Johnson, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs William Handley stated that Shastri "might not survive a major food crisis." Handley's comments implied that Indian Communists could capitalize on widespread dissatisfaction and gain greater control of Indian political and cultural institutions. For this reason, the president needed to negotiate the pending PL-480 agreement. From New Delhi, Bowles cabled the department to request that the PL-480 commodities authorized in July be shipped by October, and that Johnson make up his mind concerning the next tranche of aid. The president's indecision aggrieved Bowles, who insisted that the short tether had contributed to the erosion of the American "political position" in India. If continued, the short tether would force the position to "come apart at the seams."⁵⁶

54. Memorandum, "India and Pakistan," Bundy and Komer to Johnson, 5 October 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 446.

55. On 23 September, Johnson authorized a one-month extension of the existing PL-480 agreement and made a similar decision on 27 October 1965. Memorandum, "Shastri Visit and the Indian Food Pipeline," Bundy to Johnson, 19 October 1965, and memorandum for the record, 27 October 1965, both *ibid.*, 451, 455.

56. Telegram 531 from the Embassy in India to the Department of State, 9 September 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 378-79; Bowles to Bill Moyers, 1 October 1965, WHCF, Peace (PC) 2 Food for Peace, Box 75; Bowles to Johnson, 2 October 1965, Box 16, Correspondence Ambassador Bowles, Bundy Papers, LBJL.

Komer, also sensitive to the reality that the Indians and Pakistanis might “start accusing us of using food as a weapon,” suggested to Bundy that the president needed to approve Bowles’s request, or at least half of it. “The trick is to keep on using food as leverage by only dribbling it out slowly,” he noted, “but to do so in time to forestall public reactions. Thus we keep the GOI [Government of India] and GOP [Government of Pakistan] worried.”⁵⁷ Both Komer and Bundy argued that Johnson’s leverage would not be reduced if the administration switched to quarterly agreements in order to diffuse the “explosive issue of food as a political weapon” and fears that the United States would be associated with “possible communal slaughter.”⁵⁸ Earlier in June, Komer had questioned whether he and Bundy had “gotten across fully” to Johnson the “risks as well as the benefits of his delaying tactics.” Komer asserted that Johnson used too much stick and not enough carrot in dealing with the Indian Government on PL-480 and predicted that continued delays would damage the American reputation abroad. It had already precipitated “much anguish” in Washington, DC from those administration officials such as Freeman.⁵⁹

Johnson’s management of the famine complicated his relationship with his secretary of agriculture. Freeman, a University of Minnesota graduate, former Marine, and lawyer, provided the organizational acumen for the nascent DFL party during the 1940s and 1950s. As the first DFL governor of Minnesota, Freeman focused on expanding state services for farmers, children, veterans, and the unemployed; preserving Minnesota’s wilderness areas; and protecting workers’ rights to organize and bargain collectively.⁶⁰ Serving as Kennedy’s secretary of agriculture, Freeman advocated the concept of planned agricultural production, allowing for the cultivation of specific, enhanced food grains to meet domestic and foreign needs. Such a model helped to close the “hunger gap” by incorporating hardier seed varieties and fortified commodities. Freeman’s humanitarian convictions led him to suggest proposals designed to put the United States at the forefront of this effort and serve as a template for PL-480’s revision in 1966. He asserted that PL-480 was the “reason I wanted to be Secretary in the first place.” Although the secretary accepted, and endorsed, the justification for the short-tether policy, he understood the imperative of emer-

57. Information Memorandum, “PL 480 Problems for Your Discussion with the President,” William Handley to Rusk, 31 August 1965, reproduced in *Declassified Documents Reference System* (Farmington Hills, MI, 2005); Telegram 531 from the Embassy in India to the Department of State, 9 September 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 378-79; memorandum, Komer to Bundy, 13 September 1965, 393; Editorial Note, 12 September 1965, 392; Telegram 655 from the Embassy in India to the White House, 16 September 1965, 399-400; all are *ibid.*

58. Memorandum, Komer and Bundy to Johnson, “India and Pakistan,” 5 October 1965, *ibid.*, 444-47; “Memorandum for the President 12 September 1965 11 AM Meeting on Monday with Rusk, McNamara, Ball, Raborn, and Bundy,” NSF, Bundy Papers, Chronological File 1-15 September 1965, Box 11, LBJL.

59. Komer to Bundy, 18 June 1965, NSF National Security Council Histories Indian Famine, August 1966-February 1967, vol. I., Background Tabs 1-1B, Box 25, LBJL; memorandum, Komer to Johnson, 21 June 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 281-82.

60. See Rodney E. Leonard, *Freeman: The Governor Years 1955-1960* (Minneapolis, 2003).

gency food assistance. To Freeman, it was "immoral not to do something" to "meet the needs of hungry people."⁶¹ His position on India was clear: the Indian Government, with American assistance, had instituted various reforms designed to improve productivity. However, these efforts would prove insufficient if India's food requirements increased over the next six years as Freeman anticipated. The United States had to avoid getting "our P.L. 480 program so tied up with conditions that the flow of our commodities is choked off."⁶²

It was in this context that Freeman and Indian Food and Agriculture Minister Chidambaram Subramaniam entered into negotiations at the UN FAO Rome meeting in late November. Indian development had been characterized by a series of five-year plans beginning in 1951 and was part of an ongoing debate over according primacy to industrialization or industrial production. Clearly, some Indian agricultural officials welcomed American pressure designed to improve Indian agriculture. Exhorted by Johnson to "trade hard," Freeman accepted the reality of assuming a doctrinaire position, if only to placate Johnson, who wanted a "quid pro quo" from the Indian Government. As Freeman recorded in his diary, the president "was willing to put in food and put in fertilizer, but he wanted the assurance of some results. He stated that if they wanted to get MiGs and to build steel mills and to get ready for war that was up to them, but he wasn't going to put in any food for these purposes."⁶³ Softening somewhat, the president indicated that if India was "willing to try and improve their situation," he would be "willing to give them everything he had." Freeman interpreted his deployment to the FAO as a sign that Johnson was "clearly looking to this Department for his signals on India. He's accused everyone else in the government of being a lawyer for India and that leaves us."⁶⁴

The secretary, playing along with the president's script, "badgered" Subramaniam to accept the terms of the Rome Agreement, or Treaty of Rome, which earmarked \$5 million for agriculture during the fourth five-year plan and contained provisions for establishing fertilizer targets and allowing foreign investment in fertilizer production; improving credit; and utilizing International Rice

61. Orville L. Freeman, "The Public Philosophy of the Kennedy/Johnson Presidencies," in *The Virginia Papers on the Presidency* (1984), 16: 112; Freeman diary entry, 18 February 1964, Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Diaries, vol. 3, November 1963–25 May 1964, Box 14, Freeman Papers, MHS.

62. Memorandum, Freeman to Johnson, "A Strategy for Using P.L. 480 for World Development," 2 July 1965, WHCF, CF, FO 3–2 Mutual Security, April–July 1965, Box 47, LBJL. Transmitted to Johnson under a covering memorandum. Another copy of the memorandum is in Box 11, Freeman Papers, MHS.

63. "Memorandum for the Files: Phone Call from the President, November 17, 4:30 p.m. Just Completed," 17 November 1965, Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Notebook 1965 (7), Box 11; Freeman diary entry, 18 November 1965, USDA Diaries, vol. 6, 28 August 1965–18 May 1966, Box 15, both *ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*, memorandum, Freeman to Johnson, 20 November 1965, "1965 India," Subject File, USDA Federal Records, Box 2, LBJL.

Research Institute rice and wheat as part of a crash production program.⁶⁵ Freeman commented that his counterpart was “naturally sensitive and hesitates, as a matter of fact it’s politically impossible for him to be subject to harsh demands, on the other hand I’ve got to carry back a posture of having demanded and succeeded to clear anything through this President who has blocked all aid for some time.”⁶⁶ It also remained the responsibility of Subramaniam to convince members of India’s parliament of the program’s necessity.

The “confrontation” in Rome failed to entirely loosen Johnson’s grip on the short tether, much to the chagrin of Freeman, who had flown to Texas with recommendations for enforcing the agreement.⁶⁷ At the same time, Department of State, AID, and USDA officials in India conceded that the nation faced “imminent disaster of unprecedented proportions at least in modern history.” Komer, again concerned about a public backlash, highlighted the possibility of brokering a two- to three-month Title I arrangement that “show[ed] responsiveness, while still making India come to us.”⁶⁸ An exasperated Johnson telephoned Goldberg and instructed him to tell Komer and Bundy to “back off” on pressuring him to approve PL-480.⁶⁹ During an earlier conversation with Goldberg, the president indicated his preference to “hold” the Government of India

65. Ibid.; Telegram 1381 from the Embassy in Italy to the Department of State, 26 November 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 476-79. AID’s India director in New Delhi, John Lewis, suggested that the short tether was congruent with Johnson’s overall approach to foreign policy, as it demonstrated “hard headed, economizing toughness and far sighted, risk taking expansiveness.” “Our Chance of a Rousing Success in India,” 28 December 1965, NSF National Security Council Histories Indian Famine, August 1966-February 1967, vol. I, Background Tabs 1-1B, Box 25, LBJL. See also Leonard A. Gordon, “Wealth Equals Wisdom? The Rockefeller and Ford Foundations in India,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 554 (November 1997): 108 and Gary R. Hess, “The Role of American Philanthropic Foundations in India’s Road to Globalization during the Cold War,” in *Globalization, Philanthropy and Civil Society*, ed. Soma Hewa and Darwin W. Stapleton (New York, 2005).

66. Freeman diary entry, 24 November 1965, Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Diaries, vol. 6, Box 15, Freeman Papers, MHS.

67. Freeman diary entry, 2 December 1965, *ibid.* The Department of State pressed Johnson to amend the current agreement, especially in light of reports from Bowles, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Raymond Hare, Freeman, and Brown that the fall harvest would come in at anywhere from twelve to twenty million tons less than the previous year. As Hare concluded, “While it is difficult to gauge the point at which the pressures generated by our current stance on food will become uncontrollable in a democratic India, obviously the risks we run increase as India nears the razor’s edge in grain stocks.” See memorandum, Rusk to Johnson, 26 November 1965, NSF, Country File, India, Box 134, India’s Food Problem, vol. I, LBJL; action memorandum, “Memorandum for the President on PL-480 for India and Pakistan,” Raymond Hare to Rusk, 24 November 1965, National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1966, AID (US) 18-8 INDIA; information memorandum, “Prospective Food Crisis in India,” Hare to Rusk, 1 December 1965, *ibid.*, SOC 10 INDIA; memorandum, “India—Food and Agriculture,” Freeman to Johnson, 1 December 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 481-82; memorandum, Komer to Johnson, *ibid.*, 484-86.

68. Letter, Alan Berg to Komer, 3 December 1965, NSF Subject File, US Food for Peace, Box 15, LBJL.

69. Transcript of telephone conversation between Johnson and Goldberg, 1 December 1965, 1:10 p.m., 9303, “December 1965,” Recordings and transcripts of conversations and meetings, WH Series, Box 7, LBJL.

and "play hard with them" in order to force agricultural modernization. The problem, as Johnson perceived it, was "our own people won't hold very long. . . . They want to respond by return mail and I think if we might near got to do it; if we don't, we catch a lot of hell even from our own folks."⁷⁰

Reportage out of New Delhi indicated that Indian politicians resented this tactic. American newspapers continued to outline the dire situation faced by many Indian citizens, namely the lack of water for drinking and irrigation and the failure of food redistribution policies. Shastri's critics in parliament lambasted the government for two decades' worth of reliance on American generosity, which had forced India into a dependent role. According to one unidentified Indian politician, the United States had acted as a benevolent, yet manipulative, parent in withholding and then dispensing aid, a commodity this official likened to lollipops. The official surmised, "A steady diet of lollipops perhaps isn't a very good thing anyhow."⁷¹ Other members of parliament viewed American assistance as a means of buying Indian acquiescence on Pakistan.⁷² The American balancing act during the Indo-Pakistani conflict had angered the Indian public, who responded in some novel ways. A striking example of Indian dissatisfaction emerged during preparations for the 1965 Diwala holiday. Bakers prepared cakes shaped like Patton tanks—the model offered by the United States and used by the Pakistani army during the conflict—in order to be "chopped into pieces by their patrons' knives."⁷³

In light of the success Freeman had enjoyed in Rome and the commitments made by Subramaniam and Shastri, Johnson modified his posture. Vacationing at his Texas ranch, the president approved three months' worth (1,500,000 tons) of Title I commodities and extended a \$50 million fertilizer loan in a move calculated to placate Shastri before his scheduled February 1966 visit.⁷⁴ *Christian Century* praised this effort and added: "So long as our barns are bursting with grain we do not need, we should not let Indians starve, even if their need is their only claim on our help."⁷⁵ Convinced, especially after Shastri and Subramaniam had obtained parliamentary approval of the Rome Agreement provisions,

70. Recordings and Transcripts, Recording of a telephone conversation between Johnson and Goldberg, 1 December 1965, 1:10 p.m., WH 6512.01, Citation 9303, LBJL. Transcribed by author; Telegram Aido 747 from the Department of State to the Embassy in India, 9 December 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 498-99; "U.S. Stepping up Food Aid to India: Move Is First since Freeze during Kashmir Fighting," *New York Times*, 10 December 1965.

71. Sharokh Sabavala, "U.S. Aid Reviewed: Go It Alone Mood Detected in India," *Christian Science Monitor*, 20 November 1965.

72. "Too Little, Too Late?" *Newsweek*, 20 December 1965, 40.

73. John Hughes, "India Disillusioned with U.S. Attitude," *Christian Science Monitor*, 27 November 1965.

74. TIAS 5913, 16 U.S.T. 1833, 10 December 1965, *Treaties in Force*, 1966, 90. With regard to the fertilizer loan, the Indian Government subsequently encouraged foreign firms, among them the Phillips Petroleum Company, to construct fertilizer processing plants. *Time* magazine reported that "American firms are hurrying to get in on the ground floor." "India: Fertilizer to Fight Hunger," *Time*, 27 May 1966, 93.

75. "Famine in India," *Christian Century*, 29 December 1965, 159.

Johnson instructed Freeman to “move as much wheat as possible” to India and approved NSAM 339, creating an interagency task force focused on commodity distribution.⁷⁶ The logistical headaches associated with grain transport occupied most of Freeman’s energies during the month of December. Task force members theorized the best way to speed wheat to India; presidential adviser Jack Valenti suggested that a convoy of “flying boxcars,” modeled on the Berlin Airlift of 1948, would have the maximum effect. With the assistance of American railway and shipping companies, the USDA commandeered freight trains and packed them full of grain in Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, and ran back-to-back service between Minneapolis and Galveston, Texas, in order to fill the grain barges. Rostow went as far to remark to Valenti that sending PL-480 grain in a time of crisis lessened some of the “political and psychological burden of Vietnam” by projecting American humanity and strength.⁷⁷

As the U.S. convoy of ships sailed toward the subcontinent, the president took the opportunity to reinforce the terms of the Rome Agreement with Subramaniam. During talks in Washington in late December, Johnson informed the food minister that successful implementation of the agreement “allowed” the United States to provide additional assistance, or, in other words, if India could “keep this program going, we can help you more,” considering the American drive to “do something about health, education and poverty all over the world.”⁷⁸ Johnson, Freeman, and Rusk all reiterated the American desire for India to secure third-country support in meeting the crisis; or, as Rusk noted, India needed to “put its diplomacy into high gear.”⁷⁹ Subramaniam, understanding the bargain, noted to reporters that Johnson had given him the “confidence that the problem will be solved.” “I go back to my country inspired,” he declared.⁸⁰ The Department of State also instructed Bowles to meet with Indian officials and encourage them to organize an international consortium of donors—including the FAO and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank—in order to provide a framework for subsequent aid decisions. Johnson had made it clear that he was unwilling to let the United States assume the primary responsibility for

76. National Security Action Memorandum 339, “Critical Indian Food Situation,” 17 December 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 513-14. Within the text of the NSAM, Johnson indicated his deep concern “on humanitarian grounds” toward the disaster and noted that he “would like personally to review” Freeman’s recommendations “before deciding what action I will take.”

77. Handwritten note, Rostow to Valenti, 10 December 1965, Legislative Background, Food for India 1966, Box 1, LBJL. Representative H. B. Cooley (D-TX) also encouraged Johnson in this direction, fearing that without an immediate response, the United States might do “too little, too late” in averting famine. Cooley to Johnson, 3 February 1966, *ibid.*

78. Memorandum for the Record, “President’s Meeting with Indian Food Minister Subramaniam,” 20 December 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 517.

79. Telegram 1041 from the Department of State to New Delhi, 11 December 1965, *ibid.*, 499-500.

80. “The Folly of Others,” *Time*, 31 December 1965, 22-23.

feeding the world. Bundy and Komer offered an early assessment of the approach, noting that the short tether had unleashed an agricultural revolution. Johnson later asserted that the Rome Agreement was the "first important direct result" of the short tether.⁸¹

At the end of 1965, the president had instructed the Departments of State, Agriculture, and Treasury, in addition to AID and the Bureau of the Budget, to expedite shipment of grains to India, thus releasing the tension in the short tether. This approach also corresponded with Johnson's desire to "conduct a worldwide attack on the problems of hunger and disease and ignorance," as he outlined in his January 12, 1966, State of the Union address, which wove together the strands of the proposed food aid policy with other skeins of the global Great Society.⁸² The bargain Freeman effected with Subramaniam in November allowed the administration to justify subsequent aid arrangements prior to Shastri's visit during the spring of 1966. The trick, as Komer noted, involved balancing the short tether against increased grain shipments, as a "stable India . . . is essential to our Asian containment policy of boxing in Red China."⁸³ However, the prime minister's untimely death in January 1966 at the Tashkent (Uzbekistan) Peace Conference, convened to settle the Indo-Pak war, cast doubt on Johnson's timetable. This development raised a series of larger questions, NSC staffer Harold Saunders noted, especially with regard to Indian agricultural progress, Tashkent, and the "new team's attitude on China-Vietnam."⁸⁴ The question also emerged as to whether Johnson would approve commodity shipments while the prime ministership remained vacant, or delay additional assistance until the new prime minister could visit Washington. Fearing that the president might adopt the latter position, Subramaniam impressed upon Humphrey and Rusk, who were in New Delhi for Shastri's

81. Telegram 1124 to the Embassy in India from the Department of State with attached memorandum of conversation, 23 December 1965, National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1966, AID 10 INDIA; Telegram 1041 to the Embassy in India from the Department of State, 11 December 1965, *ibid.*, AID (US) 15-18 INDIA; memorandum, Bundy and Komer to Johnson, 22 December 1965, NSF National Security Council Histories Indian Famine, August 1966-February 1967, vol. I, Background Tab 3, Box 25, LBJL; Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 226. Several weeks before, Bundy had offered his letter of resignation to the president in order to assume the presidency at the Ford Foundation. Upon Bundy's resignation on 28 February 1966, Komer became the acting president's assistant for national security affairs. See Memorandum, Bundy to Johnson, 4 December 1965 and Editorial Note, *FRUS, 1964-1968: Organization and Management of U.S. Foreign Policy; United Nations* (Washington, DC, 2004), 33: 370-71, 373-74.

82. "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," 12 January 1966, *Public Papers: Johnson, 1966, I* (Washington, DC, 1967), 5: 7; "Special Message to the Congress on the Foreign Aid Program," 1 February 1966 and "Special Message to the Congress: Food for Freedom," 10 February 1966, both *ibid.*, 117 and 163.

83. Memorandum, Komer to Johnson, 8 January 1966, NSF Robert Komer Name File, Komer Memos, vol. II (1), Box 6, LBJL.

84. Memorandum, Saunders to Komer, 18 January 1966, India Economic, March 1965-1966 (1 of 4), NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 22 (1 of 2), LBJL.

funeral ceremonies, that stalling on PL-480 would have an adverse impact upon the already dire situation.⁸⁵

The USDA shared Subramaniam's concern that the PL-480 delay, coupled with unimpressive third-country offerings, foreshadowed another food crisis. Freeman argued that the United States might match or exceed the offers made by such countries as Iran and Yugoslavia. In his view, Indian acceptance of the Rome Agreement demonstrated the government's serious commitment to reform. More importantly, the reports reaching Washington from the USDA's experts and AID specialists in India made it clear that, regardless of the initiatives proposed or implemented, the crisis exceeded what the Indian Government had accomplished, or would accomplish in the short term.⁸⁶ Underlining Johnson's embrace of the self-help mantra, Freeman proposed a formula of food shipments designed to both "avoid famine" and further develop the agricultural sector. He hypothesized that the United States match third-country donations "in a ratio of 2 or 3 to 1." Komer, anticipating Johnson's invective, noted on Freeman's memorandum: "Orville is mad to suggest that we offer to match what other countries do." Dismissing Freeman's equation, the president instructed his adviser Joseph Califano to assist Freeman in developing a more reasonable proposal, one more amenable to congressional scrutiny.⁸⁷ Califano took Freeman's proposal and modified it to include a "stop-gap" shipment, then six million tons after Gandhi's visit, with an additional two thirds of five million tons in conjunction with third-country donations. The president wrote "No, *Hell* no. . . . Ask Freeman if he has lost his mind" on the memorandum and called Califano to berate him for being "duped by the pro-India lobbyists in the administration."⁸⁸ From the president's perspective, the administration officials, whom he termed "give away boys," responsible for Indian food aid had failed to understand or appreciate Johnson's approach—"squeezing" the Indian Government in order to effect reform. While the president was unwilling to let the Indian population starve, he was disinclined to speed food to India without some assurances of Indian acquiescence and third-country support. During a pot luck supper at the White House with several cabinet members and their wives, Johnson

85. Minister of Home Affairs G. L. Nanda served as interim prime minister until Indira Gandhi, the daughter of former Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, assumed the office. See J. Anthony Lukas, "Mrs. Gandhi Calls Food Major Issue: In First Talk to Nation, She Vows to Combat Shortage," *New York Times*, 27 January 1966.

86. Telegram 1795 from the Embassy in India to the Department of State, 14 January 1966, *FRUS 1964-1968* 25: 538-41.

87. Memorandum, "India," Freeman to Johnson, 18 January 1966; note, Johnson to Komer, 18 January 1966, both NSF Country File, India, Box 134, India's Food Problem, vol. 1 (2 of 2), LBJL; memorandum, Freeman to Johnson, 3 February 1966, USDA Federal Records, Subject Files, 1966 India, Box 4, LBJL, quoted in Califano, *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: The White House Years* (New York, 1991), 155.

88. Memorandum, Komer to Johnson, "Pak/Indian Interim Steps," 1 February 1966, NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 22 (1 of 2), LBJL.

asserted, in Freeman's words, that "he was deeply concerned about the India-Pakistan situation . . . [but] they couldn't depend on us for economic development and food forever without their taking any action."⁸⁹

Johnson's posture during these first three months of 1966 reflected the concerns he had developed during the late spring and summer of 1965, especially those linked to the success of both his foreign and domestic policies. Operating under the assumption that he possessed a limited window through which he might push his Great Society reforms, the president was loathe to disturb the relationship he had cultivated with the 89th Congress. Launching an expensive aid program with an adversarial ally, at a time when many Americans voiced their doubts about foreign aid's efficacy, had the potential to deliver a crushing blow to the fiscal year 1967 foreign aid budget. Concurrently, the Departments of State and Agriculture, and AID were preparing to "sell" Congress on the renewal of PL-480, scheduled for expiration at the end of 1966. Detecting a wariness toward aid commitments, and cognizant of the domestic agricultural situation, the administration rewrote the legislation to emphasize self-help as a criterion for PL-480 Title I assistance, christened it "Food for Freedom," and considered it the cornerstone of a global Great Society geared toward a "world war against hunger."⁹⁰ Thus, attempting to gain support for these initiatives, he insisted that any Indian PL-480 or emergency agreement required congressional approval. Speaking to Freeman on February 2, he asserted that if the American public "considered him to be a dictator, he wouldn't be in this instance, that he would share this with Congress." With members of Congress, especially J. William Fulbright (D-AR), giving him "hell

89. Recordings and Transcripts, Recording of conversation between Johnson and Freeman, 2 February 1966, 10:01 a.m. WH 6602.01, Citation 9610. Transcribed by author. Freeman diary entry, 18 January 1966, Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Diaries, vol. 6, Box 15, Freeman Papers, MHS. Johnson did authorize the release of three million tons of wheat and maize for India in early February, commenting at a cabinet meeting that this decision was necessary, as "more people will die this year from hunger in India and Pakistan than all of the people now living in North and South Vietnam." "The President's News Conference of February 4, 1966," *Public Papers: Johnson, 1966 I*: 5: 143; "Notes of a Meeting," *FRUS, 1964-1968, Vietnam 1966* (Washington, DC, 2000), 4: 256.

90. Richard Reuter to Johnson, 12 August 1965, WHCF, PC 2 Food for Peace 5/65-11/65, Box 4, LBJL; memorandum, "World Food Peace Offensive," Freeman to Johnson, 30 August 1965, Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Notebook 1965 (1), Box 11, Freeman Papers, MHS; "Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union," 12 January 1966, *Johnson Papers, 1966 I*: 7; "Special Message to the Congress on the Foreign Aid Program," 1 February 1966, 117 and "Special Message to the Congress: Food for Freedom," 10 February 1966, 163, both *ibid.*; Austin C. Wehrwein, "Birth Control Aid Abroad Wins First Approval by Congress Unit," *New York Times*, 7 May 1966; "Food Aid Policy," *New York Times*, 1 September 1966; U.S. Department of Agriculture, *The New Food Aid Program* (Washington, DC, 1966); "Statement by the President upon Signing the Food for Peace Act of 1966," 12 November 1966, *Public Papers: Johnson, 1966, II*, 1373. The text of the Food for Peace Act is printed as Public Law 89-808, approved 11 November 1966, in U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents, 1966* (Washington, DC, 1969), Document XII-16, 1076-86.

on Vietnam," Johnson understood the attractiveness of a congressional debate.⁹¹ At the time, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee launched televised hearings focusing on the 1964 Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Intending to outmaneuver Fulbright, Johnson told Rusk, "I think it'll be a good thing, they say we don't have enough discussion of these things . . . our people will know what we are doing to India . . . every truck driver will know."⁹²

Although the Shastri government had some success in launching agricultural reform measures, the president felt that the Indian leadership had failed to grasp how the Indo-U.S. diplomatic relationship should function in an increasingly complex global context. Indian leaders had illustrated this particular shortcoming by warring with their Pakistani adversaries, expressing doubts about the wisdom of U.S. Vietnam policy, and asking for greater sums of assistance. Nor had Indian efforts toward securing third-country support yielded much in the way of contributions, prompting Johnson to remark to Humphrey: "We're going to have to really have one of their top-flight people, Subramaniam or somebody else really go and on bended knees to Germany and to Britain and to the bigger powers, to Italy, and to Canada particularly and say 'Goddammit you have got to come in here and help us before our message goes up.'"⁹³ The newly appointed prime minister of India—Indira Gandhi—could counteract this negative image by agreeing to Johnson's terms. He was hesitant to make any "big commitments" with Gandhi, as he was "waiting to see what kind of foreign policy we have with your people." As the president explained to Rusk, once he and Gandhi "balance[d] the scales," he planned to send an aid message up to Congress. Rusk responded that a congressional resolution would "remind the Indians that they've got a political constituency in this country they've got to think of."⁹⁴

Johnson's strategy revealed his willingness to manipulate both the U.S. Congress and the Indian Government in order to achieve his goals. While not

91. Freeman diary entry, 3 February 1966, Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Diaries, vol. 6, Box 15, Freeman Papers, MHS; Recordings and Transcripts, Recording of conversation between Johnson and Freeman, 2 February 1966, 10:01 a.m., WH 6602.01, Citation 9607-8, LBJL. Transcribed by author. Freeman indicated in his diary that the conversation lasted almost an hour and that he was "a bit shaken up because on the one hand I've had the mission of being sure that we succeed in moving food to people in India as needed, turning loose all American ingenuity necessary to accomplish that purpose. On the other hand, every move I've taken has gotten resistance and increasing charges that I have gone soft on India."

92. Recordings and Transcripts, Recording of conversation between Johnson and Rusk, 2 February 1966, 5:29 p.m., WH 6602.02, Citation 9610, LBJL. Transcribed by author.

93. Recordings and Transcripts, Recording of conversation between Johnson and Humphrey, 5 February 1966, 10:15 a.m., WH 6602.02, Citation 9624-5, LBJL. Transcribed by author. Johnson valued the assistance provided by the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, the United Nations, and nations such as The Netherlands and Italy, but commented to Pope Paul VI that other "major producers of wheat" had disappointed the United States by their limited contributions. Telegram 1793 from the Department of State to the Embassy in Italy, 26 February 1966, National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1966, SOC 10 INDIA.

94. Recordings and Transcripts, Recording of conversation between Johnson and Rusk, 2 February 1966, 5:29 p.m., WH 6602.02, Citation 9610, LBJL. Transcribed by author.

a novel approach, it offered several benefits. The president knew that the Food for Peace program enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress, especially among Midwestern Republicans such as Karl Mundt (R-SD). In addition, the Senate in 1966 counted among its members former Food for Peace Director McGovern and Humphrey protégé Walter Mondale (D-MN). McGovern and Mondale had separately introduced legislation in 1965 allowing for increases in food aid spending, creation of a national food reserve, and the transformation of the Food for Peace office into a cabinet position.⁹⁵ They, and other proponents of PL-480, would lobby for the type of food aid program Johnson envisioned and insulate the president from domestic and foreign criticism. Freeman expressed some concern that an "anti-Indian" sentiment might surface in the Congress, to which Johnson responded was "just a lot of India ____ that he was damned if he was going to make all this available quietly and under the table, that Congress also had to get in the act, put up or shut up."⁹⁶ Placing the impetus on Congress also provided the administration with the leverage it needed to push the Indian Government in the desired direction. The "push" consisted of offering interim, emergency shipments of grain prior to Gandhi's arrival and "conditioning" directed at Gandhi, in order for her to establish a rapport with Johnson. In a series of telegrams and notes, Komer instructed Nehru and Bowles to "influence" Gandhi's approach to the president, to the extent that the prime minister personalized the American goals as her own. Shared goals suggested equanimity, when, in reality, Johnson held all the cards.⁹⁷

As with Subramaniam, administration officials planned to strike a bargain with Gandhi, culminating in her support for agricultural modernization and U.S. policy goals in South and Southeast Asia. Rusk encapsulated these ideas in a Department of State briefing memorandum entitled "The Economic Bargain with Mrs. Gandhi," noting "confidence on our part that India will press forward aggressively to accelerate its economic development through liberal economic policies . . . and confidence on Mrs. Gandhi's part that the U.S. can be counted on to provide necessary financial support." Komer, prior to assuming his new position as head of pacification efforts in Vietnam, added that Johnson had the Indians "where you've wanted them ever since last April. . . . This is precisely where we wanted to maneuver the Indians—into saying they'll help themselves if we'll respond in turn." He praised Johnson's efforts, noting "You have already

95. *Congressional Record*, 89th Cong., 2d sess., 1965, pt. 10: 13998; "US Farms' Help Urged for Needy: Senate Plan Wants Surplus Food for World's Hungry," *New York Times*, 29 August 1965; *Congressional Record*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1965, pt. 14: 18870; Saville R. Davis, "U.S. Urged to Declare World War on Famine," *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 October 1965.

96. Freeman diary entry, 27 March 1966. Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Diaries, vol. 6, Box 15, Freeman Papers, MHS. The omission is in the original text.

97. Memoranda, "Indira Gandhi Visit," Komer to Johnson, 10 March 1966 and "Gandhi Visit," 21 March 1966, both NSF, Files of Robert W. Komer, Box 22 (1 of 2), LBJL; Telegram 1751 from the Department of State to the Embassy in India, "Indian Food Crisis," 18 March 1966, National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1966, SOC 10 INDIA. Also repeated to the embassy in France as Paris 44.



Figure 1: Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi meets with President Lyndon Johnson in the White House Oval Office, March 28, 1966. LBJ Library and Museum, Public Domain Image A2192. Photograph by Yoichi R. Okamoto.

proved how our holding back on PL-480 can force India into revolutionizing its agriculture. Once the famine is licked, I'm for continuing to ride PL-480 with a short rein—it will be painful, but productive. If these points don't add up to requiring self-help, I'll eat them."⁹⁸

Meeting with Gandhi in late March 1966 (Figure 1), the president drew parallels between his political situation and hers, highlighting the reality that both had assumed office upon the unanticipated deaths of their predecessors. American policymakers understood the unique burdens India shouldered: Chinese aggression, tensions with Pakistan, and, currently, famine. India could best serve both Indian and American interests by continuing to implement the Rome Agreement reforms and accepting, or at least tolerating, American efforts to assist the South Vietnamese in “defend[ing] their freedom.” The resultant *U.S.-Indian Joint Communiqué: Reaffirmation of the Strong Bonds of Friendship between the United States and India* reflected these ideals. Privately, Johnson expressed to Rusk his frustration with Gandhi, notably, his perception that Gandhi appeared “unconcerned” with the worsening famine, as she failed, in the president’s eyes, to forcefully advocate for additional PL-480 grains. Rusk agreed, noting that he “had the same experience . . . she didn’t take any initiative . . . I had to keep pulling at her.”⁹⁹ Bowles’s counseling sessions had proven successful.

Gandhi’s state visit provided the necessary backdrop for the president’s food message, targeted to domestic and foreign audiences. The drafting of the

98. Memorandum, “The Economic Bargain with Mrs. Gandhi,” Rusk to Johnson, 26 March 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 588-89; memorandum, “Final Notes on Gandhi Visit,” Komer to Johnson, 27 March 1966, *ibid.*, 593.

99. Recordings and Transcripts, Recording of conversation between Johnson and Rusk, 28 March 1966, 4:44 p.m., WH 6603.09, Citation 9918, LBJL. Transcribed by author.

message again illustrated the cleavages that persisted between the president (and his inner circle of advisers) and the officials charged with carrying out the policies. The Department of State bureaus and entities responsible for either food assistance or South Asian policy chafed at the prospect of preparing a draft. Special Assistant to the Secretary (Food for Peace) Richard Reuter noted that Johnson was "asking the Congress for authority which we already have." Reuter criticized the tactic of pressuring the Indian Government to obtain third-country assistance, noting that it was "using up leverage." Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs Thomas Mann expressed his concern that a congressional debate would ground pending PL-480 agreements to a halt.¹⁰⁰ AID Director William Gaud feared that such an address would precipitate additional food rioting and hoarding in India and impair Gandhi's political image.¹⁰¹ Undeterred, Johnson outlined the emergency food program in a March 30 message to Congress, likening the situation to that faced by American farmers during the Great Depression. Contradicting his private statements, Johnson insisted that the United States would not "drive a hard mathematical bargain where hunger is involved." If third-country donations were insufficient, the United States would provide additional commodities "before we stand by and watch children starve." While highlighting the shortcomings in Indian agricultural production, Johnson also faulted the Pakistani and Communist Chinese Governments for drawing Indian attention away from this matter and, by extension, American goals for South Asia. By drawing upon the democratic connections between the United States and India, the history of U.S. humanitarian efforts, and the emotional image of impoverished children, the president all but guaranteed congressional approval of the emergency legislation.¹⁰²

The House and Senate provided, in the words of Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Allen Ellender (D-LA), "congressional endorsement" for the path the administration always planned to take. The India Food Resolution (HJ Res 997-PL-89-406) offered the Indian Government 3.5 million tons of wheat, corn, vegetable oil, powered milk, tobacco, and cotton, slated to last through December 1966, and outlined longer-range goals, including the establishment of an

100. Memorandum, "Proposed Message on Coping with Hunger in India," Reuter to Mann, 25 March 1966, National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1966, SOC 10 INDIA; memorandum, "Indian Food Crisis," Reuter to Rusk, 21 March 1966, Box 12, Correspondence and Memoranda, State Department 1966, Richard W. Reuter Papers, JFKL; memorandum, "Food for India," Mann to Rusk, 26 March 1966, National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1966, AID (US) 15-8 INDIA; memorandum, "Proposed Message on India's Food Needs," Gaud to Califano, 25 March 1966, WHCF, CF FO 3-2 Mutual Security January-March 1966, Box 48, LBJL; memorandum, Komer to Johnson, 21 March 1966, *ibid.*; action memorandum, "Allocation of PL 480 Grain for India," William Handley to Rusk and Mann, 25 March 1966, National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1966, AID (US) 15 INDIA.

101. Memorandum, "Proposed Message on India's Food Needs," Gaud to Califano, 25 March 1966, WHCF, FO 3-2 Mutual Security January-March 1966, Box 48, LBJL.

102. "Special Message to the Congress Proposing an Emergency Food Aid Program for India," 30 March 1966, *Public Papers: Johnson, 1966 I*: 5: 366-69; *Congress and the Nation*, vol. II, 1965-1968, *Congressional Quarterly* (Washington, DC, 1969), 72, 570.

agricultural training corps and an Indo-U.S. foundation. Of particular significance, the resolution provided congressional support for Indian voluntary family-planning programs. This action solidified the relationship between American food assistance and population control and legitimized the use of U.S. funds for purchasing birth control, such as intrauterine devices. The legislation also encouraged the Indian Government to seek additional support from the food-producing nations of Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Rusk had already positioned the Department of State to assume some responsibility for securing assistance by dispatching a circular telegram to all embassies and legations instructing ambassadors and deputy chiefs of mission to "urge" host governments to "respond generously and quickly to the great humanitarian needs in India." Rostow noted that the response was overwhelming, even among those nations suffering from their own agricultural shortfalls. "They," he commented, "draw a graphic picture of the world's food problem!" His comments were based, in part, on a Department of State memorandum listing the various contributions. The Government of Kenya, for instance, was unable to "provide even token help to India because it still requires famine relief itself. Only surplus food here is elephant meat on the hoof."¹⁰³

Once Johnson obtained the congressional approval he desired, but did not need, he emphasized the humanitarian characteristic of food aid and connected it to the larger struggle the United States faced in Vietnam. Attempting to counteract newspaper images of immolated Vietnamese monks, Freeman encouraged the president to participate in a ceremony marking the dispatch of the five millionth ton of grain to India.¹⁰⁴ Johnson's advisers viewed a Midwestern visit to either Omaha, Nebraska or Duluth, Minnesota as desirable, considering the timing of the midyear congressional elections and growing dissatisfaction in the Farm Belt over the president's Vietnam policies.¹⁰⁵ In late June, Johnson, standing on the deck of a grain barge moored at the Omaha Cargill docks, held a symbolic glass jar of wheat and reiterated the American commitment to the less fortunate and to fighting against "poverty, ignorance, and disease." American efforts meant that the Indian people would not starve

103. "United States Participation in Relieving Victims of Hunger in India," 19 April 1966, published as Document IX-53, U.S. Department of State, Office of the Historian, *American Foreign Policy: Current Documents 1966* (Washington, DC, 1969), 688; Circular Telegram from the Department of State to All Embassies and Legations, 30 March 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 608; memorandum, Rostow to Johnson, 3 April 1966, *ibid.*, 608-9; memorandum, "President Johnson's Food for India Message," Benjamin Read to Rostow, 2 April 1966, National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1966, SOC 10 INDIA.

104. Weekly Report, Freeman to Johnson, 1 June 1966, Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Notebook, 1966 (1), Box 11, Freeman Papers, MHS; confidential memorandum, Robert Kintner to Rostow, 23 June 1966, WHCF, CF, FO 3-2 Mutual Security April-December 1966, Box 48, LBJL; "Two Threats to World Peace"—Remarks in Omaha on the Occasion of Sending the Five-Millionth Ton of Grain to India," 30 June 1966, *Johnson Papers*, 1966 I: 5: 679-80.

105. Bruce E. Altshuler, *LBJ and the Polls* (University of Florida Social Sciences Monograph 77) (Gainesville, FL, 1990), 84.

and the application of American expertise translated into Indian self-sufficiency. By contrast, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese leadership destroyed what the Americans and South Vietnamese had built. Nonetheless, the administration and its allies continued to "work as friends and neighbors to grow more food, to build more schools, to heal the sick, to care for the old, to encourage the young."

Taken together, the 1965 Treaty of Rome and 1966 Indian Food Resolution contained the blueprints for Indian self-sufficiency. Throughout the spring and summer of 1966, the Gandhi government pursued a variety of U.S.-"sanctioned" activities designed to improve the economy and the agricultural sector. Devaluation of the rupee and endorsement of family-planning practices constituted a part of what Indian Planning Minister Asoka Mehta termed India's "Great Change."¹⁰⁶ Mehta solidified the connection between India and the United States by casting the Great Change in terms of the Great Society. A "clamoring for changes" now characterized Indian society. Gandhi also encouraged private investment in Indian fertilizer plant and research into new forms of crop strains. The government also partnered with the Ford and Rockefeller foundations to launch programs designed to bring new methods and products to Indian farmers. Meanwhile, the U.S. Government provided support to America's land-grant universities, the University of Nebraska and Purdue University among them, to facilitate further development of drought-resistant crops and nutritional fortification of various grains.

Gandhi's bargain with the United States, while providing necessary grains, was not immune from attack. The prime minister's critics on the left, notably former Defense Minister V. K. Krishna Menon, assailed her for compromising Indian nonalignment. Menon found the establishment of the Indo-U.S. Foundation an "intrusion" into Indian cultural and educational life.¹⁰⁷ Gandhi, in a May 12 letter to Johnson, speculated that these attacks were partially political in nature—that opposition parties and members of her own party intended to use the food crisis to force her from power. She had made attempts to circumvent these political attacks, according to Bowles, by communicating directly to the Indian people in the form of speaking engagements and radio broadcasts. The reality that Gandhi had "boldly staked her political future" with the United States and its allies suggested a new era in Indian history, "reminiscent of the early days of the New Deal."¹⁰⁸ Despite opposition, the Gandhi government pushed forward on the import liberalization schemes suggested by the United States and the World Bank.

Regardless of the optimism generated by the Indian reform measures, the administration reverted back to the short tether during the summer of 1966.

106. "Memorandum for the Record, Summary Record of the President's Meeting with Indian Planning Minister Asoka Mehta," 4 May 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 637.

107. Warren Unna, "Mrs. Gandhi Meets the Press and Takes It Like a Pro," *Washington Post*, 20 April 1966; J. Anthony Lukas, "Menon Attacks India's Premier," *New York Times*, 27 April 1966.

108. Bowles to Johnson, 5 May 1965, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 640-41.

The domestic agricultural situation existed as the fundamental reason for curbing both emergency food shipments and PL-480 agreements. Freeman noted the irony, lamenting that “the Russian roulette part is that as I personally have led the fight to reduce surpluses to necessary reserves so I might one day be held responsible for the fact that a disaster around the world could not be met and people might starve because the United States no longer has surpluses to meet any conceivable need around the world.”¹⁰⁹ The success of the Food for Peace program, coupled with poor weather in the Great Plains states, resulted in 14 percent less wheat than in 1965 and required that the United States purchase PL-480 grain on the worldwide market and instruct American farmers to plant more wheat.¹¹⁰ A July 19, 1966, NSC meeting devoted to the “World Food Problem” amplified the dilemma the United States faced. Johnson instructed the cabinet secretaries—scheduled to speak at the upcoming Development Assistance Committee (DAC) meeting—to “make clear that the United States is deadly serious about a worldwide effort to fight hunger.”¹¹¹

Indian requirements, however, meant that the USDA, AID, and the Department of State continued to advocate for shipments. Freeman had toured several South Asian nations during the first part of July and returned to the United States convinced that Indian and Pakistani food needs would be even greater during the next fiscal year. He anticipated that the administration could add grain to the PL-480 agreement still in effect to get India through the rest of 1966 and then negotiate a new agreement under the revised Food for Freedom legislation prior to the Indian elections. Johnson rejected the Freeman-Gaud-Rusk aid proposal for an additional 1.2 million tons of grain and annotated the covering memorandum: “We must hold onto all the wheat we can. Send nothing unless we break an iron bound agreement by not sending.”¹¹² The president expressed more concern toward American bread prices than Indian food stocks. As prices rose, Johnson, in September, asked Rostow, by then serving as special assistant for national security affairs, whether the United States could temporarily suspend PL-480 agreements in order to force a price drop. Although the USDA, Bureau of the Budget (BOB), and the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) insisted that any effect would be negligible, Johnson spurned the advice

109. Memorandum for the Files, 25 July 1966. Freeman drafted the memorandum and asked that a copy of it be placed in his diary for that time period. Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Diaries, vol. 7, Box 15, MHS.

110. “Food: An All-Consuming Opportunity,” *Time*, 1 July 1966, 74.

111. Summary Notes of the 562d Meeting of the National Security Council, 19 July 1966, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 700-701.

112. Report, “The President and Indian Famine: August 1966-February 1967, Volume I,” NSF National Security Council Histories Indian Famine, vol. I. Narrative and Guide to Documents, Box 25, LBJL; memorandum, “Next PL 480 Agreements for India and Pakistan,” Howard Wriggins to Johnson, 24 August 1966, NSF, Country Files, India, Box 134, “India’s Food Problem,” vol. I (1 of 2), LBJL; memorandum, Saunders to Rostow, 15 September 1966 and memorandum, Wriggins to Rostow, “Indian PL 480,” 22 September 1966, both NSF National Security Council Histories Indian Famine, August 1966-February 1967, vol. III, Guide to Documents Tabs 6-25, Box 26, LBJL.

and opted to stall throughout September and October. The only relief came in the form of an October 14 wheat shipment, comprised of grains previously allocated in March, scheduled to leave U.S. ports by October 31.¹¹³

The Indian political climate also justified continued food shipments. Indian elections were scheduled for the spring of 1967, and thus Gandhi would need to capture the prime ministership in her own right. As the Indian Government had linked its agricultural fortunes to the United States, any adverse PL-480 decision the Johnson administration made impacted Gandhi's political future and, hence, the viability of the Indian state. Rostow raised this point with the president prior to Johnson's October departure on a two-week goodwill tour of Southeast Asia. The national security adviser pressed Johnson to approve the agreement pending since August. "The question is," Rostow posed, "whether Mrs. Gandhi can show that US aid pays off or whether her opposition makes stick its charge that she's sold India's dignity for a mess of pottage." Gaud, meanwhile, stressed the reality that the food crisis was of such magnitude that the nascent self-help initiatives were of little immediate value. Neither delays on PL-480 or criticism of Indian efforts could "possibly improve Indian performance in the agricultural sector before the national elections in February."¹¹⁴

Strained diplomatic relations between the United States and India also influenced Johnson's decision to delay food agreements. Vietnam, unsurprisingly, served as the point of contention between the two powers, as it had a year earlier. During July 1966, Gandhi had traveled to Moscow for a series of conversations with Soviet Chairman of the Council of Ministers Alexei Kosygin. Of singular importance was the release of an Indo-Soviet communiqué that called for an end to the U.S. bombing campaign of North Vietnam, reaffirmed the recognition of two German states, and endorsed the abolition of apartheid in South Africa. Gandhi then signed a similar communiqué with Yugoslav President Josef Tito and Egyptian President Abdul Nasser in October. Consistent with his thinking concerning Shastri's government, Johnson believed that Gandhi and her cabinet needed to pursue diplomacy beneficial to U.S. strategic interests in the area. Challenging the U.S. position on Vietnam appeared to undermine the Indo-American friendship strengthened as a result of Johnson's tough diplomatic approach. Rusk cautioned Bowles that Gandhi, after the Moscow communiqué, "should not be in the mood to take us for granted." As H. W. Brands has noted,

113. Freeman diary entry, Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Diaries, vol. 7, Box 15, Freeman Papers, MHS; memorandum, "Effect of P.L. 480 sales on domestic wheat prices," Charles Zwick to Rostow, 1 September 1966; memorandum, "Effect on domestic wheat prices of the pending P.L. 480 agreement with India," Zwick to Rostow, 12 September 1966; and memorandum, "Amending the Current India and Pakistan Agreements," John Schnittker to Johnson, 14 October 1966, all NSF National Security Council Histories Indian Famine, August 1966–February 1967, vol. III, Guide to Documents Tabs 6–25, Box 26, LBJL.

114. Memorandum, "Indian Agricultural Performance," Gaud to Rostow, 8 October 1966, *ibid.*

Gandhi's actions were, in Johnson's mind, a "betrayal, a personal affront, and a demonstration of all that was wrong with India generally."¹¹⁵

Johnson continued to hold the short tether taut throughout November and most of December. An early November telephone exchange between the president in Texas and Freeman in Washington illustrated the interconnectedness of domestic political concerns, Indian diplomatic approaches, and the president's overall frustration. Although Indian agricultural efforts had fallen short in certain areas, Freeman suggested that Johnson authorize another 1.2 million tons of grain for the Indian food pipeline. A week earlier, the Republican party had captured a number of national and statewide political offices during the midterm congressional and gubernatorial elections. Approving the pending PL-480 request, in the wake of this defeat, opened Johnson up to greater criticism of his foreign policy. "I can't take a recommendation like yours," he exhorted Freeman, "and Rusk who just says 'me too' on any goddamn thing you can dream up. I can't do that and feed India another year. I'm not going to unless Congress does."¹¹⁶ The PL-480 stalemate persisted through November, although Rusk informed the press that the administration had focused "urgent attention" upon the situation, culminating in the dispatch of two separate investigating teams—USDA and congressional—to India.¹¹⁷ The USDA team concluded that the Indian Government's crash agricultural reform program deserved an "A for effort," but that the government would be unable to offset the current crisis without substantial assistance from the United States. Freeman, noting that the food deficit was concentrated in areas far from the coasts, pressed for an immediate shipment of 2 million tons of wheat, a suggestion Johnson rejected.¹¹⁸

Gandhi's political shortcomings, in Johnson's mind, explained why he resisted making an immediate decision. The prime minister had failed to abolish the Indian system of food zones dating to the colonial period. Such a zonal arrangement meant that each state managed its own food supply; India's confederal system prevented the central government from procuring stocks from surplus states for disbursement to deficit ones. The gap in rations between states, according to Nick Cullather, "provided (literally) a visceral

115. Telegram 80047 from the Department of State to the Embassy in India, 7 November 1966, National Archives, RG 59, Central Files 1964-1966, AID (US) 15 INDIA. Quoted in H. W. Brands, *India and the United States: The Cold Peace*, (Boston, 1990), 121.

116. Editorial Note, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 758.

117. Selig S. Harrison, "LBJ Delays India's New Food Pact: Apparent Move to Speed Reforms Alarms New Delhi," *Washington Post*, 21 November 1966.

118. Memorandum, "Evaluation of Agricultural Self-Help Efforts and Review of Food Situation in India," Martin Abel and Arthur Thompson to Freeman, 27 November 1966, NSF National Security Council Histories Indian Famine, August 1966-February 1967, vol. III, Guide to Documents Tabs 26-46, Box 26, LBJL; Editorial Note, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 763-66; memorandum, "India-Analysis Team Report-Recommendation," Freeman to Johnson, 28 November 1966, *ibid.*, 770-72.

reminder of India's disunity."¹¹⁹ This arrangement mattered little to Johnson, who insisted that if Vermont faced a food crisis, he would look to Texas or another surplus state before asking for bilateral assistance. As he lectured at Freeman, "I just don't see why they ought to call Uncle Sam. They got eleven million more tons of production this year than they had last year when we gave them ten. Themselves. Now, they haven't had a goddamn big failure. They've just produced eleven million more than they had last year. But they're just on that tit and they want ten million free tons, and we want it for our farmers and so nobody here is stopping."¹²⁰ Despite the "mutually enforcing" nature of the short tether, Shastri and Gandhi, in Johnson's view, continued to rely upon the United States, even when Johnson argued that their food requirements had been met.

The viewpoint gaining currency in December 1966, however, stemmed from the belief that the administration was "playing politics" with food aid when a genuine need existed. Freeman argued that the Indians had "come close" to meeting the objectives outlined by the United States. He remained convinced that if the United States failed to act, India would face not only starvation as early as January 1967 but also a collapse of the Gandhi government. Bowles, in an attempt to "get through" to Johnson, cabled the White House directly in order to outline the severity of the crisis. If the president failed to act, he insisted, it would not "be long before our TV screens and front pages will be overflowing with grim pictures and stories of this tragic situation." Within days, the major American newspapers and periodicals carried articles and editorials attacking the delay. The *Washington Post* suggested that "good reasons" existed for the administration's self-help provisions but "people sometimes starve to death in the short run and India is on the brink of famine. It also is on the eve of an election and starvation does not ordinarily induce an electorate to behave rationally." The *New York Times*, in an editorial entitled "Gambling with Famine," accepted the argument that the United States wanted other countries to supply food: "The objective is laudable. But the method chosen to achieve it, at a time when the subcontinent is living from ship to mouth, involves a dangerous gamble." Johnson insisted that the press had read him incorrectly, depicting him as a "heartless man willing to let innocent people die," although *Newsweek* chose to describe him as "Machiavelli with a heart."¹²¹

119. Nick Cullather, "Lyndon Johnson, Indira Gandhi, and the Political Dramatics of Famine," paper presented at the U.S. Department of State "South Asia in Crisis: U.S. Policy 1961-1972" International Conference, 29 June 2005. Paper is in the possession of the author.

120. Editorial Note, *FRUS, 1964-1968* 25: 763-66.

121. "Gambling with Famine," *New York Times*, 12 December 1966. See also Selig S. Harrison, "LBJ Delays India's New Food Pact," *Washington Post*, 21 November 1966; J. Anthony Lukas, "U.S. Delay on Food Puzzles Hungry India," *New York Times*, 4 December 1966; Carroll Kilpatrick, "Delay on Food Aid for India Designed as Shock Therapy," *Washington Post*, 5 December 1966; "Food for India," *Washington Post*, 11 December 1966; Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, 228; "Diplomacy: Foodmanship," *Newsweek*, 19 December 1966.

Despite the reservations of his aides and the media crescendo, Johnson, as he did during early 1966, allowed the Indian food question to twist in the wind. Retreating to his Texas ranch, the president instructed Rostow that he would not act until he received congressional backing or some assurances that other countries would provide grain.¹²² Johnson communicated to Freeman that his “withholding” on India had “resulted in other countries coming in.”¹²³ He bided his time until the congressional study team—headed by Kansas Republican Robert Dole—requested that the United States provide aid in a Title II emergency allotment in order to “persuade GOI [Government of India] officials and the Indian press to move more quickly toward the United States position regarding Vietnam and to change open criticism of U.S. military strategy to one of condemnation of Communist aggression.”¹²⁴ The administration, on December 22, approved the shipment of 900,000 tons of grain to India. By the end of 1966, India had absorbed 55 percent of all Title I commodity agreements negotiated during that calendar year.¹²⁵

The case of the Johnson administration’s Food for Peace program in India serves as a noteworthy example of the president’s ability to apply and balance the humanitarian aspects of the Great Society with U.S. cold war foreign-policy interests. It illuminates, in much the same way as historians have characterized Johnson’s role in Europe and in the way Johnson approached his very first foreign policy crisis in Panama during the early months of 1964, the president’s willingness to micromanage a foreign policy issue that held personal and philosophical interest. Although the short tether may not have resulted in the kind of strong support from India for U.S. foreign policy initiatives sought by the administration, Johnson’s personal imprint is unmistakable. NSC staffer W. Howard Wriggins recalled the impact Johnson had on Indian officials, especially B. K. Nehru, when the Indian ambassador later described to him an encounter he had with Johnson shortly after Gandhi’s 1966 visit. “Do you know,” Nehru commented to Wriggins, “as we talked, I realized that your President knew far more about Indian agriculture than I did? He knew where the rains had been weak; he knew about how much fertilizer our farmers used or didn’t, where we had sparse irrigation systems needing repair. . . . He showed me his weekly reports of rain falling in Oklahoma and the Dakotas so he could judge how much wheat he dared export

122. Memorandum for the Record, 28 November 1966, *FRUS, 1964–1968* 25: 772–73. Drafted by Francis Bator, who later became Rostow’s deputy.

123. Freeman diary entry, 19 December 1966, Secretary of Agriculture Files, USDA Diaries, vol. 7, Box 15, Freeman Papers, MHS.

124. William Robert Poage, Jack Miller, and Robert Dole to Freeman, 20 December 1966, NSF National Security Council Histories Indian Famine, August 1966–February 1967, vol. III., Guide to Document Tabs 47–70, Box 26, LBJL.

125. *The Food Aid Program 1966: Annual Report on Public Law 480*, 90th Cong., 1st sess., House Document no. 179, 16.

before bread prices would rise and cause him political problems. His detailed knowledge was astonishing. His commitment to see improvement in India’s food output was deeply touching. As I drove away from my talk with him, I had tears in my eyes.”¹²⁶

126. Wiggins provided this quotation within the context of his larger remarks concerning U.S.-South Asian relations during the Johnson administration, which he delivered at the Department of State’s “South Asia in Crisis: U.S. Policy 1961–1972” conference, 29 June 2005. Comments are in the possession of the author.